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THE

MOORS AND THE FENS.

BY

F. G. TRAFFORD.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE MOORS AND THE FENS.

CHAPTER I.

A WARNING.

It was the day before that fixed for the ceremony when a grey-haired man, with high cheek bones, clear, keen, blue eyes, and a frame wiry and still erect, alighted from one of the numerous coaches that, in those days, conveyed passengers from the Eastern Counties—safely, perhaps, but not very speedily—into London. His dress seemed that of another country and a byegone age; his accent was Scotch, and sounded harsh and almost unintelligible in the ears of those of whom he inquired his route through the many devious thoroughfares and lanes and squares of England's capital.

He wanted to understand his way, he said, to a place they called "Shedlock Street;" and accordingly, by dint of constant questioning and much

weary walking, he found it. He paced through the streets without once pausing to look at the public buildings, or the shop windows, or the endless crowd of people; he braved the crossings with the air of a man whose mind was too much disturbed to permit him to feel any anxiety concerning the safety of his body. When, at length, he reached the abode of which he had come so far in search, he asked, almost breathlessly, "to be let see Miss Mina;" but the servant, not immediately comprehending the meaning of his request, he impatiently bade her say "to the young leddy, that one Colin Saunders was below."

"One Colin Saunders," cried Mina when the message was repeated to her, and, springing up and passing the astonished domestic on the landing, she sped down the stairs to welcome him, as she might have done had he been a father or a brother.

"Colin, old friend," she said, taking his hard hand in both of hers, and looking through blinding tears in the honest face that worked with uncontrollable emotion at this reception, "why did you never come to see me before?"

The scene and the actors appeared out of place in a matter-of-fact London street; many a passer-by turned a curious glance back at the old man, with

his gaunt figure and antiquated garments, who stood on the pipe-clayed stone steps of that modern house, his hat off and his long grey hair fluttering in the breeze.

The meeting, perhaps, was very unlike what it should have been amongst houses and pavements and the proud, cold, exclusive conventionalities of every day city, or indeed, for that matter, every day country life. It could only, in fact, have seemed thoroughly "in keeping" upon the top of some lonely mountain in that land whence both had come, amidst the broken shafts and pillars and moss-covered monuments of a ruined abbey, or by the margin of some stern, dark, silent lake: but the human heart refuses to be always bound by custom, place, or circumstances, for, in the forms of emotions and passions, it possesses wings of its own, which bear it, in moments of excitement, far beyond all ordinary rules of society; and, in times of pleasure or of sorrow, it sets the bonds and fetters of what is so erroneously termed decorum at defiance, and either, in the excess of its joy or the intensity of its agony, stands for one brief instant—free.

Thus it was with Mina: when she heard the sound of that familiar name, which came on her soul like a smile or a breath or a voice from the time of her

childhood, such a rush of old feelings and associations and memories swelled tumultuously up in her bosom, that it seemed almost as though the severe and sudden strain would have snapped her life strings.

The past was recalled so vividly to mind, that, for the minute, the present was completely forgotten; but the flush of pleasure rapidly faded from her cheek, and the sorrowful, troubled look stole back over her face as Mina brought her humble friend into her most humble home "to talk to her."

He gazed around the room and then at her, ere the words,

"Time was, and that no so very long ago either, Miss Mina, when I didna think it would ever be my misfortune to see you in a place like this," came forth almost unwittingly from his lips.

"This country is not like ours, I admit, Colin," she sadly replied, "and there is a vast deal of difference between this house and my old home; but one gets to care less for these sort of things as one grows older, and I have never repined because the first part of my life was the best of it."

"After I first came to England, Miss Mina," resumed the old man, not directly replying to her

observation, "Jessie and I used to be talking ever and always, about you, and she still would be asking me, as you did but just now, why I never came to see you. 'I dinna want till see her,' I kept saying, and she thought it hard and made answer,

"'I have never, father, been about her as you were, and yet I wish I could just get one sight of her bonny face; I would be glad to see her, and I wonder you can say you would not.'

"But then I told her that, though I might be glad enough to speak to you once more in one way, I would be more vexed in another, for I knew I could not expect to find you, as you ought to be, in a fine place of your own; and I felt, when I thought of the changes that have come upon you and the house you were born in, that my heart would be sore to look on the child of my dear old master."

"He died in time, Colin," answered Mina; "so did my poor mother: would to God I could say I feel as resigned to His will in all things as I do to their deaths."

"Miss Mina, do you mind how the sun used to shine down upon the loch?" he said abruptly, after a pause.

"It has not seemed to shine so anywhere else for many years," she responded.

"And how quiet, and solemn, and beautiful the islands looked with the bright waters rippling round about them?"

"When I close my eyes any hour, either by day or by night, I can see them still," Mina sighed.

"And you have not forgot a garden where a bit of a child wi' long streaming hair——"

"Used to pull up your plants to see if they were growing, Colin," she added. "No, no, I have forgotten nothing: the hills and the valleys, the rivers and the mountains, the spreading trees and the blooming flowers are fresh in my memory as the day I last looked on them; and my parents and my uncle I know are living, though I cannot see them; and the child, too, I recollect; but, alas! the years that have passed since then, have changed me into a very world-tired, weary, indifferent sort of woman;" and the tears started into her eyes as she thought of that, her life's bright early dawn, and of this, which she considered its dark mournful setting.

"You are a child no longer, Miss Mina, it is true," he said; "but the child's heart is in ye still, for all that; weary, ye may be, and no doubt are, but the world, nor its troubles, nor its pomps, nor

its vanities has not destroyed the nature that was in ye then. No; ye came down like as ye might have done years and years ago, with the old kindly look in your face, to speak to the grey-headed man who was about your father before you were born, who saw you when you were but a helpless baby, who was fond and proud of his master's child, who has come at last, Miss Mina, to see you where he once hoped never to see you, but where he would now make so free as humbly to ask you to stay."

"How!" exclaimed his auditor, a sudden flush mounting to her temples.

"Dinna be angry with me," he pleaded; "dinna be offended wi' one that would die to serve you; it is very free of me, I know, but somebody ought to tell ye,—why not I?"

"What?" demanded Mina.

"That marry, ye mauna; come to that place, ye canna: isn't it true what they told me, that ye were thinking of taking for a husband my master's son?"

"And suppose it be true, why should I not?" she asked.

"Because you could not live among them; you would die."

"So much the better," she replied.

"When God's time comes, so much the better for

us all, Miss Mina, but not till then," he said, reverently; "it is against my rule and my custom and my conscience to speak ill of those whose money I earn, whose pleasure I serve, whose servant I am; but in regard of you, I have felt it to be my duty to tell you this one thing, that, though as far as the gentleman himself is concerned I have little to say —and that little, good—yet I would rather follow you to your grave than hear of your wedding. It would not give me as sad a heart to hear you were lying in your coffin, or even working for your daily bread, as to know you were coming to that place—as I fear you will—to eat it in sorrow and repentance many and many a day."

She rose from her chair, and commenced pacing up and down the room, as was her wont when strongly agitated: but she never answered; she did not seem to dream of doing so; and, after a pause, the old man proceeded,

"Often and often at Craigmaver—the time you and Mr. Malcolm was there, the time before the last, you remember, Miss Mina—when I saw how proud and happy they were all to have you with them, and the colour that was in your face, and the light that was in your eye, I thought within myself—it was foolish, and, perhaps, I ought not now

to speak of my quiet notions—but I did think that if you and the young laird could have made it up, many a one besides me would have been glad to see you coming home to your own country to live always there."

Mina smiled bitterly, while Colin fixed a keen eye on her as if to read a secret which existed not in her heart, which had never existed there; and she replied,

"Yes, I feel sure you would; and I thank all the true, honest, Highland hearts that dwell about Craigmaver for the undeserved affection they cherished for me: but you see," she added, in a lighter tone, intended to put an end to the discussion, "it was predestined from the commencement of time, as you would say, that we were not to 'make it up.' My cousin Allan has chosen a handsomer, and a gayer, and a wealthier wife than I could ever have been, even had misfortune in early times passed by our dwelling: she brought sunshine into the old house, was like a daughter to my uncle—a friend to all, and I—I voluntarily chose another land for my abiding place, new friends, new acquaintances, new ties, finally a husband, whom—spite of your warnings—I mean to marry."

"Is 't for love?" he asked simply.

"Do people generally wed without affection?" she said, in a hurried and somewhat stern tone; but the old man merely shook his head, sorrowfully, in answer; whilst resting both his hands on the black thorn stick he carried, he gazed earnestly in her face.

"I daurna say more about that," he at length began, "for there's a look in your eye that I dinna like,—that never was there when you were a child, unless pain or anger, or some sort of vexation ruffled your temper: but I must speak out my mind about the other thing—about your wedding; if you marry Mr. Ivraine, you will marry to certain misery; to a life that must be full of sorrow and care for years and years, most likely never bring any pleasure. The gentleman is not happy himself; how he expects you to be so—that is, supposing he does—I canna tell. His own heart has been broken there, and so will yours if you do not think in time: they tell me he was as free and fine a lad as ever lived, till his mother died; but that after that, as the baronet got closer and closer and harder, and himself older, he grew more sorrowful and silent day by day, till at last nobody would have known him for the same. He has a father and an aunt, Miss Mina, who would grind the spirit out of any one;

misers, and almost demons, they are counted: this young man has hardly a shilling he can call his own; and, though some people think he will be sole heir when his father dies, others say he will not have a guinea excepting the entailed estate, which Sir Ernest has mortgaged till it is of no value at all. The old baronet likes to keep everything in his own power; and it is my belief he is just living, nobody knows how, for spite, and to prevent his son ever saying he owns an acre of ground, and mortgaging the property, so that if he ever does come into possession of it, he may not have a bit of enjoyment of the swampy place."

Mina paused to listen, and, as he proceeded, a sort of half-surprised, half-sympathising expression stole over her face. Colin Saunders surely knew nothing of the nature of "womankind," or he never would have drawn such a picture in order to deter her from matrimony. The tempers and characters of the feminine portion of the creation are various as those of the opposite sex; but there is one point in which they all agree, namely, to "love best those who need love most." Test a woman by the contact of adversity, and whether you be her parent, brother, friend, husband, child, feel assured she will stand the severest trial nobly; if not, feel equally

assured she is merely a base counterfeit, wearing the woman's garb, carrying the woman's face, but wanting the woman's heart, deficient in woman's best attribute. Moore has condensed the whole thing into two musical lines :—

> "I know not, I ask not, if guilt's in that heart,
> I but know that I love thee whatever thou art."

Which sounds very foolish and overstrained in poetry, perhaps, but occasionally seems sublime in actual life.

The propensity may, however, be indulged to an absurd extent, and it occasionally makes ladies appear very ridiculous, especially when they carry these Quixotic ideas with them to the threshold of matrimony,—whence, sometimes, it might be well for them if they carried their notions away again without crossing the frontier separating fancy from reality, the theoretical sentimental part of poverty from its practical every-day details; and it was pre-eminently ridiculous of Mina not to take warning in time, because she had once affirmed she was "marrying for a home"—not for love—Ernest Ivraine, and certainly the home presented now for her imagination to dwell upon was not so particularly inviting as to tempt her to enter it.

But, as the Hibernian said, there is undoubtedly a contrariness about pigs, geese, and women, which always induces them to go just the opposite way, and do just the opposite thing, from that which it was desired or expected they should; and thus, in answer to poor Colin's detail of Paradise and its inhabitants, Mina merely softly soliloquised,

"So, Ernest Ivraine is poor and unhappy?"

"Poor as he can be," interposed Colin, who hoped—most erroneously, however—that his words had produced the desired effect. "Poor as he can be, and, as those who are most about and nearest him say, perfectly miserable."

"It is well," she remarked, "sorrow should marry sorrow; it ought never to sit down by a happy hearth, to cast a shadow there: the suffering can feel for those who have suffered."

"You will not, though——" he began.

"I would not draw back now," she said, "if you could give me a kingdom for doing so."

"You were always rash and headstrong and hard to turn, Miss Mina," he ejaculated, "and——"

"Am so still," she finished; "Colin, you have meant most kindly, and have done me a service you little dream of, though not in the way you intended: but remonstrance is of no use; I will brave father

and aunt—enter even the miser's home, and try whether, by patience and hope, I cannot make that home happier for *him.*"

The words fell with a heavy crash on the old man's heart; he knew what she was bringing on herself, though she did not: if he had thought his corpse lying across the portal would have prevented her entering that dreary abode, he would cheerfully have stretched himself dead in her path. There was a sort of despair in his face, a tone of dread and horror in his voice, that might have deterred the girl from the perilous step she expressed her determination of taking; but she would not be warned.

"Oh! Miss Mina," he cried, flinging himself before her, "oh! Miss Mina, child of my dear old master, whom I have loved so well—that which I would do most for, you or my own flesh and blood, I never could well tell: I never knelt to mortal being before; never, but to Him who created and died for us all; but now, on my bended knees, I implore you not to become wife to an Ivraine, not to bring your young heart to that wretched house, for it to be darkened by trouble deeper and heavier than it has ever yet known: by your father's memory, for the sake of your dead mother, as you value your

own happiness, I implore of you think in time and break off the match."

"Do not kneel before me, old friend," said the girl, with a gush of tears, laying her hand on the shoulder of her father's faithful servitor; "what am I, to be so thought of, so remembered, to meet with such devotion? Break off the match, as you want me, I cannot; and if I could, I would not: poverty and sorrow might perhaps prove preventives to some, but to me they seem merely recommendations. Stay, stay," she added, seeing him turn sadly, as if to depart, "you must wait to see Mr. Malcolm and to eat something."

But the old man answered in a choking voice,

"I dinna want to see or hear anything more, Miss Mina; and I couldna eat now, if you would set the brawest feast before me: no, no, my heart 's too full; it 's full to bursting, for I have come on a useless errand, and I am going back with a black answer; and ye winna take warning till the time rins past for it to be of any use till ye; and you 're set to come amongst ye don't know what, to a place where you have never been, to a home where you won't be welcome, at the asking of a man who can never make you happy;" and, as he spoke the last words with a sort of despairing emphasis, he

passed from the room and out into the street hurriedly, as if afraid of trusting himself with another glance at her who, with those last stinging words rankling in her memory, remained still resolute in her determination to marry Mr. Ivraine.

"I said I would do so when I thought him haughty, rich, and proud," she reflected; "I will not retract now, when I find he is only poor, reserved, miserable."

But though, as regarded himself, a different feeling had sprung up in her heart, there were others to dread, others to think of: quite sufficient remained to render the future a dreadful uncertainty, a thing to fear, a journey to shrink from.

"Yet he will be kind to me," she murmured; "for if he have been unhappy himself, he will feel for me, and he can surely make them treat his wife with some consideration. I know he will help Malcolm on to wealth and rank, or, at worst, employment, a subsistence: and for me, why he must be fond of me, as he wishes me to marry him, and it will still be a home;" and once again the painful smile, which had become almost habitual to her, but which Colin's words had dispelled for a few minutes, flickered over her face as she thought of how she once had dreamed of something more in a home

than a mere shelter; of the visions of success, the hopes of wealth, the thoughts of wild romantic scenery, amid which Malcolm was to own an estate, and she and Miss Caldera were to keep house for him; of long pleasant rides over the breezy moors, of walks on the lonely hills, where the heather sprang up again after light feet had bent it; of moonlight evenings on the bosom of the waters She had dreamed of a home like this,—a retreat surrounded by beauty and luxury and happiness in the land of her birth; not near Craigmaver, however: and the vision she woke to in a London street was marrying—for a "mere shelter, and not for love"—a man who called a miser father and who dwelt, with a cloud on his brow and trouble in his heart, amidst the fens and swamps and flat desolation of Lincolnshire.

Then she tried to forget all, save that he was unhappy, which fact seemed occasionally to make her feel perfectly tranquil: she laid out a scheme for bearing everything patiently and striving to render his life more endurable, if she could. She commenced forthwith to foster a number of very absurd unworldly ideas; and, for the benevolent purpose of warning any sentimental young lady who may ever feel tempted to cherish any similarly ridi-

culous fancies, I must chronicle here—a little in advance of my story, it is true, but that is a matter of secondary importance—that it would have been far better for Mina Frazer, and happier and altogether more desirable for both, if her intended husband had been a little richer, a little franker, a little less miserable, a little less of a slave; her position as a wife would have proved much pleasanter, had his home and his relatives and his circumstances been a little more like what they ought, for a man to dream of marrying upon; but I am walking on too fast for the tedious progress of events to keep pace with, which is a pity,—seeing that, if the fair reader cannot find all the above out for herself ere very long, Mina's marriage must have turned out a most happy one, as all marriages, whether in books or out of books, ought to do, but which, unhappily, they very frequently do not.

So Mina spent that day, sometimes despairing, sometimes rejoicing, sometimes fearing, sometimes hoping; and the next morning put a termination to the possibility of drawing back in time, or of thinking to any purpose, or to the usefulness of despairing or fearing, or dreading, or anything save bearing patiently, for Mina then became Mrs. Ivraine, and entered herself as student in the school of resigna-

tion; but for years, spite of her good resolutions and good conduct and earnest struggles with herself, she never passed her examination nor obtained a degree in that extremely needful and beautiful branch of female education, which some have a natural genius for and others spend their lives striving to master. A very few walk into their graves without ever finding it necessary to learn, or deeming it possible for the practice of so very vulgar a virtue to contribute to their own or other's happiness. Few like to con the lesson, most have to do it: the saints of this world, those who seem too good to be sent upon the earth at all, alone take kindly to it. Mina did not, but she tried hard; she had refused to listen to advice in time, and was consequently forced to submit to the results; and, considering her nature, she did bear patiently—wonderfully so—for long.

Meanwhile, he who had travelled so far and so uselessly to warn the child of his dead master of the characters of those amongst whom she persisted in casting her lot, after hurrying out of the house, rushed on, wandering through London he hardly knew whither, till his senses were restored in a somewhat singular manner, by coming unexpectedly in such rough contact with a gentleman at the

corner of a street as effectually, to borrow a phrase from an Irish hod-man, "knocked his brains into shape again."

"Where the devil are you going to?" growled out the individual in question, who felt himself to be the aggrieved party in the rencontre, and, perhaps, so he was.

"No the same gait as you, at any rate, Lord be praised," retorted Colin, stooping to pick up his hat, which had been pitched off by the force of the concussion, and contriving to render this sentence more in the form of a malediction against his opponent than a thanksgiving on his own account.

"Some infernal Scotch rascal," muttered the other, pushing past the old man, who, catching a full view of his face as he did so, first stood still and gaped in blank amazement, and then, uttering a "Gude save us a'," that distinctly proved on which side of the Tweed he had been born, turned and followed him.

Down lanes, across courts, through crowded thoroughfares, in quiet streets,—he stuck to him like a shadow. The gentleman walked fast, but so did Colin; if he paused for a moment to speak to an acquaintance, the Highlander took refuge

behind a group of neighbouring talkers, or else skulked into some door-way or passage, keeping his eye fixed on him all the time. From the instant he had first caught sight of the person who thus excited his curiosity, till he dropped him at an office in Wapping, he never once removed his gaze from his figure. It is no easy matter, even for a Londoner, to track an individual to his den, and it is doubly difficult for a stranger, who is liable to be jostled and pushed and diverted from his path and his object at every turn; but Colin was strong, not in experience or knowledge, but in a determined Scottish temper, which enabled him to forget everything but his purpose, and to elbow his way in a manner which drew down upon him not a few masculine maledictions and feminine remonstrances; little he cared about either so as he set down his man—that was all he desired.

"Can you tell me who that gentleman may be who has just gone in there, young man?" he asked a sort of porter who was assisting to load some casks at the next warehouse.

"Yes; that's Mr. Westwood, old 'un," irreverently responded the fellow, mocking Saunders's Highland accent with his pert English tongue; "were you wanting to be specially introduced to

him? because, if you do, I should feel proud to stand godfather and present you."

"It was more, I am sure, than yours did the day you were baptized, that is, supposing you ever had a drop of clean water on your face, a thing I scarcely think likely, looking at it now," retorted Colin, gazing curiously at the man's smoke-begrimed visage, which speech turned the laugh against the porter, whilst one of his civiler fellows exclaimed,

"See, there he be again; that is Mr. Westwood."

The person in question was standing on the step of his office door, speaking to a clerk, as Colin turned and gazed fixedly at him.

For a moment the successful merchant remained unconscious that a pair of keen grey eyes were fastened on his countenance; but, at length, chancing to glance towards the spot where Colin stood, he met that fixed earnest look and quailed beneath it.

"Do you want half-a-crown to mend a dinge in your hat, friend?" he said at length, with a sort of audacious coolness.

"No I don't," rejoined Colin, moving a step or two towards him, and rejecting the coin so nervously proffered, with an air of insulted dignity.

"I want nothing from ye, only a fair look at ye."

"Faith, you have taken a tolerable stare," exclaimed Mr. Westwood; "I am happy to have been able to gratify you in this respect: how do you think I look?"

"Pretty well," half whispered Colin, "for a man who has been dead and buried these twenty years, at any rate."

Mr. Westwood shrank back as if a blow had been dealt him, and before he recovered his self-possession, Colin Saunders was gone, followed by a volley of curses, none the less fervent because silent, from the partner of the late Mr. Merapie, and by a complimentary remark from the lips of one of the porters, who pulled a mocking face at his companions, and said,

"Sawney was a rum old cove."

The person so referred to went and paid a visit to his daughter and her husband, and stayed a day or two with them, catechizing the children and squabbling over disputed doctrines with Frith, and reading and praying and haranguing and expounding; but through all, he never mentioned a syllable about his accidental rencontre with Alfred Westwood to any one, and never felt a single minute's

peace of mind concerning his poor dear Miss Mina, to whom it is time to return after this brief digression, and join almost at the very entrance to Paradise, for Ernest and she were driving there.

The wind howled and moaned through the leafless trees, a lament for the young heart coming amongst them to be crushed and broken; the heavy gate swung back on its rusty hinges tardily as though it would fain have denied her admission to the gloomy precincts lying beyond. There was a weight she found it impossible to shake off lying heavy on the spirit of the new made wife,—a shadow black as night, born half of sorrow, half of apprehension, clouding the brow of her husband; but the carriage rolled past the desolate porter's lodge and along the neglected drive, where moss and grass deadened the sound of its wheels.

The gate creaked once more on its hinges, and the grating of the key in the lock struck on the ear of the new comer with a pang, as the sound of a prison bolt jars on that of a criminal. The long ragged branches of the ancient lime and beech trees bent mournfully over the passing vehicle, and tossed their arms to and fro, as if lamenting to the winter sky: and thus, without a word of welcome, or a thought of joy, in the chill, cold, depressing semi-

darkness of a January afternoon fast fading into night, Mina Ivraine came to that for which she had paid an inordinate price, to that for which she had wept, pined, suffered, struggled, married,—Home.

CHAPTER II.

HOME.

THE vehicle stopped before the portals of that home, and was welcomed by such a perfect Babel of barking dogs that it seemed as if the entire place were inhabited by them alone. The old hall echoed to their loud alarum, and every dreary corridor, interminable staircase, tenantless apartment, and wandering passage, in the house, sent back a hollow sullen reply, which struck such a chill to Mina's heart that, had escape then been possible, she would have flown to the loneliest isle of the ocean, and thankfully taken up her abode in that desert spot, sooner than have sought a permanent abiding place where unhappily she had found it—there.

She cast one hurried wistful glance over the long line of windows, false and real, ranged in two dreary rows along the front of the uninviting

mansion: not a light glimmered in one of them; not a solitary gleam of fire glanced forth into the gathering darkness without, to dispel, by even a momentary ray of hope and cheerfulness, the deeper darkness dwelling in a woman's breast.

"It even would have looked like a friend," she thought; but there was no retreat: she had chosen —reluctantly and sorrowfully it might be, but still she had chosen—to go so far, and she was perfectly well aware she had no choice now but to proceed still further. So, making a strong effort to conquer her feelings of repugnance, she ascended the broken flight of steps; and, as she did so, the heavy door swung suddenly open, and forth rushed a whole troop of half-starved noisy dogs, that sprang out growling and barking and yelping as if with the fixed intention of tearing the intruder to pieces ere help of any kind could reach her.

"Ernest!" she cried, shrinking back in terror as hounds and terriers and bulldogs closed around her; but the sound of his well known voice, crying, "Down, Satan! silence, Danger! be quiet, Lion!" speedily produced a sort of comparative calm, and brought the animals, fawning and whining and crouching, about him.

"Where is Sir Ernest?" asked Mr. Ivraine of

the decrepid old man whom the baying of the dogs had first attracted to the spot.

"In the dining room, sir," was the response.

"Have you no candle?" Ernest demanded, drawing his wife closer to him and feeling how, spite of all her efforts at composure, she shivered and trembled.

"I brought one, sir," he said, "but the draught as I opened the door put it out; I will get you a light, sir, immediately:" and he shuffled away across the hall as if to do so.

"No, never mind," interposed Mr. Ivraine hastily. "Help the driver off with those boxes, and put them in the paneled room—tell your wife to light a fire there—and let her be ready to attend Mrs. Ivraine—and——come on Mina."

There was nothing unkind in his tone; on the contrary, considering his usual manner and the abrupt sternness of his character, it was almost tender: yet with what a terrified sickening heart she heard his mandate, and obeyed the same she herself felt—he perhaps imagined.

He led her through the dreary desolate hall, then down a gloomy corridor, which had, so it seemed to Mina, a cold, damp, chill smell like that of a family vault; but at length he paused by a door near the

further end, and waited for a moment ere turning the handle, as if he were irresolute whether to enter or not.

"Yes," he murmured after a second's consideration, "she may as well come in now and get it over."

Though the words were uttered in so low a tone as to be almost inaudible, his wife's quick ear heard, and her quicker thought applied, them.

"Get it over:" this, then, was her welcome—an interview to be dreaded, a foe to be faced, an enemy to be overcome. Well, no matter; she had nerved herself for the worst, and, let that worst be bad as it might, it could scarcely be more appalling than her fancy pictured it.

Mina felt as if she had become hardened within the last few minutes, and truly it was high time she should; for Ernest, having flung open the door of the apartment, was now striding hastily across the carpetless floor, and his wife felt him clutch her hand almost convulsively as he dragged, rather than led her along, to the fireplace, at one side of which an old man was crouching, flanked on the other by a woman whose face, as well as Mina could discern it, was pinched and worn and wrinkled to an extreme.

Both turned their heads as the new comers advanced towards them; and Sir Ernest, after he had shot one glance back into the gloom, fairly twisted himself round in his chair to gain a nearer view of the pair, who came forth out of the darkness and stood within the shadowy circle, rescued from total obscurity by the faint flickering of the only apology for firelight the baronet ever permitted to be enjoyed in his mansion.

"You have stayed away long enough this time," began Sir Ernest; "I thought, perhaps, you were going to remain from home altogether."

"No, sir, I am here," replied his son.

"So I see," was the brief rejoinder; "and I see more than that."

"My wife, father."

There was a something absolutely appealing in the way the younger man pronounced the last word. It sounded as if he had used that expression, hoping to win some word of gentleness for the being he had the misfortune—for so he truly felt it—to call his. It was a brief setting forth of the relations in which they all stood,—his wife—his father; but the sense of the expression was only just so far heeded by Sir Ernest, as to cause him to sneer while he responded,

"Your wife! you turned benedict! you married!

and so you have been good enough to provide a daughter-in-law for your father, without first asking his consent; wedded without my knowledge, and brought her home here without my permission. *Your* wife! the lady who won a smile from you must surely be matchless amongst women: this is she, you say,—let me see."

And the baronet, stretching forth a long bony arm, caught Mina with his vulture-like fingers and pulled her towards him, whilst his widowed sister, forgetting for once her economy in her curiosity, flung a few dry twigs and branches on the fire, which, igniting instantly, threw for a moment a strong bright glare of light on the haggard, pallid face of the young wife, whom thus they greeted.

"Humph! nothing remarkable for beauty, at any rate," was the old man's complimentary observation, after completing a scrutiny, under which Mina's eyes had sought the ground, blinded with tears of wounded pride and vain regret. "And now tell me, child," he added, seizing her slender wrist so tightly that she felt she might as well strive to free herself from some powerful vice as from that rude iron grasp, "and now tell me, child, have you any money?"

The question was put so suddenly—it was so

completely unlike anything she had prepared herself for, that Mina, thrown altogether out of her usual line of thought—half stupified and wholly bewildered—misunderstood the object of his sentence, and almost involuntarily put her disengaged hand into her pocket to draw forth the scanty sum she could still call her's: but, ere she had time to accomplish this intention, or her husband could collect sufficient presence of mind to frame what he considered a suitable reply, the baronet interposed with,

"Pshaw! I did not mean that: I want to know the amount of your dower, your fortune—you understand."

Ernest made a rapid attempt to intercept an answer, but in vain; for, before she was aware of his wish, before she gave herself a second to reflect, the straightforward confession, "I have none," passed her lips, and then Mina, trembling and guilty, stood mute, awaiting and dreading the next speech her father-in-law might choose to address to her.

"It is over, at any rate," thought the happy husband, "she can say nothing worse than that, and he can hear nothing worse;" but Ernest was mistaken.

"None!" slowly repeated the old man, griping

the delicate wrist in a still firmer manner, as if he really desired to hurt her, "none, nor any expectations?"

He paused and listened eagerly for her reply; but none came; she did not even sob: she had arrived at a state of such agony, that she was past seeming agitated; she was so fascinated by the cold steady gaze of those keen, cruel, vindictive eyes, that the tears became frozen in her own soft melancholy orbs, and she could do nothing but look fearfully at him and return that reply which is frequently so much more expressive than any words—silence.

But Sir Ernest Ivraine was not the man to be put off with any such womanly stratagem, and therefore, after waiting an instant in vain for an explicit reply, he said, in an imperious tone,

"Come, answer me directly; have you any expectations?"

"No," murmured his victim.

"Well, there can be no disappointment there, at all events," remarked the baronet in a withering tone; "and now, as I wish clearly to understand this matter, may I ask who you are?"

There had been a time, and that not so very long past, when Mina Ivraine would boldly have answered, "The wife of your son, and as such

entitled to consideration and respect in the house of his father;" but sorrow, if it had not broken her spirit, had crushed it, and with a suffocating feeling at her heart and a wild sorrow in her soul,—she responded,

"I am an orphan."

If he had possessed the slightest touch of human feeling, the words might have moved him; but Sir Ernest saw only in the drooping form and slender figure of the young creature who uttered them the visible outlines of a something to be hated, wherefore he harshly proceeded:

"Don't pretend to misunderstand me; for though you may be an orphan now, it is to be presumed you had parents once,—who were they?"

"My father was an officer, sir," replied Mina, the warm Highland blood tingling through her veins as anger, for a moment, mastered grief, "Captain Allan Frazer, of the —th Regiment, formerly owner of Glenfiord, near Loch Lomond, and nephew to Mr. Frazer, the head of our clan, who lived at Craigmaver in ——shire"

"Humph!" ejaculated the baronet, *sotto voce*; "and your mother?"

"Was an English lady, daughter to Mr. Merapie, at one time a merchant in London."

"A pauper Scotchman, and a bankrupt London trader," was Sir Ernest's sneering summary of poor Mina's genealogical confessions, relaxing at the same time his hold sufficiently to permit of her shrinking back terrified to her former position by Ernest's side. "And so, sir," he continued, addressing his son in a tone of concentrated fury, "this is the final result of your frequent absences from home; no wonder you were ashamed, in the full light of day, to return with your beggar bride to your father's house,—that house which you have so disgraced; no wonder you skulk back in the dusk to announce your having bound yourself for life to a person, of whose advent you were afraid to inform me beforehand, lest I should have given orders to close the doors on both of you, and told the servants to turn you indignantly from the gates; but your silence shall not avail you, sir: you thought if you once got in, it was all right; that, having gained an entrance, you had little to fear. But I tell you, no! Sir Ernest Ivraine is not to be browbeaten by living mortal; he is not to be defeated by any stratagem; he is not to be deluded by any scheme, no matter how artfully concocted; he will not be trapped or coerced into receiving a creature like this into his abode, into recognizing her as a

relative of his, into lending his sanction to a *mésalliance*. As you have chosen to marry and bring your wife here to please yourself, I command you to leave this house and take her with you to please me. No remonstrances, no arguments, sir; take her out of my sight, remove her instantly, and go yourself."

Ernest stood irresolute. Heaven knew how gladly at that moment he would have obeyed the command; but where was he to remove her to? He could not speak; he remained like one spell-bound; but Mina spoke for him, wildly, passionately, imploringly.

"Don't blame him," she cried, flinging herself before the old man, bending in supplication to the hardest and stingiest and meanest of mortals, forgetting everything at the instant, save that she had sown enmity between father and son, brought sorrow to her husband, misery to herself, "don't blame him, don't be angry, sir, with him; it was my fault, mine alone: I will go; I, not he, am the intruder: I am so sorry; but I never dreamt of this, I never dreamt of wrong; only do not be angry with your son, and I will go, I will do anything you require."

"Can you *unmarry* him?" growled out the baronet; "if you can do that, you are talking to

some purpose; if not, you may keep silence. You have wrought mischief enough: you thought, no doubt, you were making a great match, marrying a rich man, stepping into a comfortable establishment; but you were mistaken: he is a beggar; he has not a shilling, and I will never leave him one, never! I cut him off, I renounce him, I disown him as my son: away! away! You trapped him into it, then, you acknowledge that. 'All your fault;' I do not doubt it: take him away and see how you can live on dark looks and few words; it is all the food he will give you. Don't kneel there; I hate to see you: take her away, sir, and go immediately yourself."

As he might have raised a child, Ernest lifted her from the floor; but she suddenly broke from him and turned to the fourth person in the room, who had, during this period, maintained a profound silence.

"Lady," she said calmly, for she was calm now, "to you I appeal, not for myself, but for him; listen to me and I will tell you how it came to pass, and then, I know, you will mediate between them. I was not born to penury; I had once a happy home, a kind father, the right to expect wealth, almost the certainty of fortune; but death

and adversity entered our dwelling when I was a little child, swept home and competence and happiness from us, carried my father to a better world, and left us beggared. My mother had a brother, however, living in London; he was very rich and kind and good; he took us home to his house, educated us, gave us reason to believe he would never leave us badly off; he acted a father's part towards all; and when I first met Mr. Ivraine, no one could have imagined I should ever come to know absolute want,—no one. One night my uncle came home, sat down to write a will, intending to leave us a suitable provision, but death interposed——"

"We have had enough," interrupted Sir Ernest savagely; but his sister laid her skeleton hand on Mina's arm and bade her proceed.

"I found him next morning," resumed Mina, getting out the words she scarcely knew how, "with the unfinished document beside him, quite dead, quite; and we! within twenty-four hours, we were all turned out of the house by a stranger woman, who came representing herself to be his wife, and who was his wife, and whose son stepped into our place, leaving us, for the second time, paupers."

"Cease that!" exclaimed Sir Ernest; "I want

to hear no more of your family details, false or true: you are wasting time to no purpose; cease, I tell you."

"Go on," said the miser's sister, keeping her glittering eyes fixed on Mina's face, "go on."

"We had some money," she continued; "but, not having been then much accustomed to economy, it rapidly diminished, and a long journey to Scotland reduced our resources to very little. There, our surviving parent died; trouble tracked every step we took; ill success attended our efforts to make an independence for ourselves. Our relatives wanted us to stay with them, but we were proud: we came to London to try if there were anything we could do; but, alas! we had not been educated to earn our daily bread, for we were proud, self-willed, ignorant of the world and of the difficulties of getting on in it. My brother was about to leave me: I had no home to which I had any right; I had one good friend, some wealthy relatives; but still I stood, so far as any claim to sympathy, any title to assistance went, utterly desolate in the world. Then he married me; in his great kindness, in my great distress, he asked me to become his wife: he was so generous as never to speak of my want of fortune. I ought to have considered that, myself,

but I did not; it was my place to have refused to bring sorrow on him, but I knew nothing of him further than his goodness; I did wrong,—I see it now. All the fault was mine: he has erred through unselfishness, I from never thinking of him at all. Will you, at the request of an orphan, plead to his father, not for me, but for him?"

"Peace!" thundered Sir Ernest, in a tone which brought Mina's speech to a rapid conclusion; "take her away," he continued, turning to his son, "take her out of my sight, I command you!"

Without answering a word, Ernest laid a hand on his wife and drew her out of the room. His aunt's eyes followed her to the door, and then sought the flickering firelight. It is hard to say what she saw in the embers, what chord had been touched by Mina's appeal to her woman's feelings, what memory had been awakened by the sound of that soft young voice recounting her sorrows; but something in the scene had affected her, for she abruptly stopped Sir Ernest's vehement expressions of rage, by remarking, without withdrawing her eyes from the smouldering logs,

"If I were you, I would not send her away."

"Not send her away, not send her away!" he almost screamed; "and, pray, why not?"

"Because she won't cost much, and can be made useful; I can manage her."

"Do you really mean what you say?" he asked, half incredulously.

"I do."

"And why should she stay?" he demanded for the second time.

"Because I choose her to remain," the lady replied dogmatically; having delivered herself of which astounding announcement, she rose and walked out of the room.

"Do not go," she said to Ernest in the corridor, "do not go to-night."

"Believe me, I have no intention," he sullenly answered, as she flitted by him and disappeared in the darkness beyond, like some spectre haunting that dreary abode.

She and Sir Ernest, for days previously, had been, not actually "quarrelling," but indulging in that species of warfare popularly known as "sparring;" she had, therefore, resolved from the first moment of her nephew's arrival, not to side with his father against him. If there were anybody in the world for whom she entertained a shadow of attachment, it was Ernest. Henry, upon his marriage, had offended her grievously; for the young

man, who perfectly detested his aunt, had not merely virtually ignored her very existence, but had induced his wealthy high-born bride to do the same: the spirit of opposition and the spirit of revenge had both induced her to take Ernest's part; and when Mina turned and confidently asked her to plead their cause,—when, through the flickering light, she saw an almost child-like figure standing imploringly before her, and heard her repeat, in a voice subdued by sorrow, yet rendered steady by a good purpose, the brief story of her sufferings, her desolation, his kindness, his disinterested affection, some strange feeling was aroused. Perhaps there floated before the eyes of the miser's sister a shadowy memory of her own girlhood, of a time when money was not everything; perhaps the soft tones of Mina's voice came on her soul like something better and sweeter than aught which had swept over it for years; perhaps, whatever of woman's nature long habits of hoarding and saving had left in her bosom was touched at sight of the young wife's utter helplessness; perhaps she really did think that, as Sir Ernest, not she, would have to maintain the new comer, it might not be altogether unpleasant for her to have a meek docile slave always at hand to order about and watch and

domineer over and employ in all sorts of domestic drudgery.

At any rate, it is certain she wished Ernest to remain, for she felt as if he kept all other connections miles and miles away from Paradise: she dreaded their advent and Henry's return; for, oh! how, in former days, the latter had insulted and reproached her with parsimony, and accused her of dishonesty, and expressed his contempt for her, even in her own house, when he was merely a beardless lad, she angrily remembered; and she felt that, now he was wealthy and independent, he and his wife could soon render Paradise no abiding place for her.

She and Sir Ernest had so frequently quarrelled since Henry's marriage: the baronet seemed so uplifted about the match his youngest born had made; he had grown so overbearing at times, that she felt vindictively glad another son had humbled his pride by making a dowerless girl his wife, one whom she could obtain immediate mastery over; who would treat her respectfully, as her husband did; who would be thankful for a word, a look—who had pleaded so humbly to her,—humbly as Mina Ivraine had never pleaded before to mortal.

There is no saying what induced her to take Ernest's part; but, contrary to all his expectations,

she did do so. She was not all bad; she was a more genuine miser than Sir Ernest; she had more of the magpie nature in her than even he; she pinched and starved and economized more than her brother: she had a bitter, domineering temper, a sour, dissatisfied heart; but still she was not as bad as he, not quite.

"You are to cease crying and to come to supper," were the words she addressed to Mina upon opening the door of the room where, crouching in an old arm chair, the "happy bride" was weeping; "you need not mind lighting that fire," she added, speaking to an aged woman who was engaged in trying to get some damp wood to burn in a long disused grate; "Mrs. Ivraine can warm herself in the dining-room, and the night is not very cold."

Such a look of pity as the female turned towards the drooping figure of the young wife! it contained a sort of prophesy of years of hopeless suffering, of a life-time of misery, of a dull dreary eternity of sorrow! There was scarce a thing in the chronicles of misfortune that glance did not predict for the frail bark launched upon such an ocean of turmoil and care; but, without uttering a syllable, she quitted the apartment and descended to the kitchens.

"There 's a young heart come here to be broken, Roger," she said, "a slight delicate creature to be crushed and tortured and killed, for they will kill her one way or another; there never was a woman lived here long."

"God's will be done!" devoutly responded her husband. He could say those words, but Mina found it impossible: sitting, shrinking back in that huge chair, as if she desired to bury herself from observation, listening to the dry, short exhortations of her husband's aunt, who told her she should remain in Paradise, as if that assurance contained a sort of concentrated essence of the balm of happiness; as if, after she had said it, Mina ought to dry her eyes and become contented in heart, as if there was no sorrow in life to be compared to that of being ordered out of that wretched den, and sent forth into the world penniless and free.

At length Mina did repress her tears and raise her head and stand up before the miser's sister; at length she opened her lips and answered the lady's many sentences, with one brief one.

"Madam, I see it is better I should go; I ought never to have come here, but I have a friend whose door stands always open to receive me. I will relieve Sir Ernest Ivraine of my presence; I will

never intrude on him, or his, more; if he will only forgive his son and forget everything about me,—it is all I ask."

"Sir Ernest Ivraine asked if you could *unmarry* his son,—give him back the freedom he once possessed, loosen the tie, snap the bond, make yourself no wife, my nephew no husband. If you can do so, go; if not, I advise you to stay."

"I cannot give him freedom from that tie," cried Mina half wildly, "but I can relieve you all from my presence, render myself almost as though I had never been; I am not likely to live very long; death in a little time will accomplish all you can desire; and, if I go away now, surely the baronet would forgive his son and wait for that event, which will end my sorrows for ever: I have done your nephew a great injury; I did not see it before, but I know it now."

"You have injured him," said Mrs. Close, laying a hand on her auditor's wrist,—so cold, so death-like, so little resembling the touch of mortal fingers, that it froze up Mina's feelings in her breast and caused the blood to stagnate around her heart; "you have injured him more than you know, more than you can imagine; but, as you cannot recal the past, be advised as to the future: going will not

mend matters; it can only make them worse: my nephew would not remain behind, and he ought not to leave this place. You must stay and compel him to stay; there is wealth, money, gold at stake, —gold, girl," the woman repeated, and her eyes gleamed so as she pronounced that magic word, that Mina felt as though it were a something appalling to be standing in that remote apartment in that hobgoblin house all alone with such a weird, unearthly being, who seemed merely to be linked to humanity by a few bones and muscles, who was scarcely human, even in outward appearance, who was neither flesh nor spirit, but a horrible distortion of both.

Still, let her be fiend, or woman, or phantom, or whatever else she liked, her sentence decided Mina's unsteady purpose. Ernest, in answer to her entreaties to permit her to go alone, had announced his fixed intention of their remaining in the house together and braving the severest outburst of his father's displeasure. He told her it would not last long, and that then matters would be better; but Mina could not credit the latter statement: she saw he was trying to persuade her into believing what he did not believe himself. He bade her never to speak of departure again, assured her all would

soon be well, and left her sullenly determined to "face the matter silently out," and never to leave the house, unless compelled by actual force to obey his father's mandate; and, as Mrs. Close echoed all his words, Mina submitted to her doom and prepared to settle herself down in that house, amongst her new relatives, with such an appearance of resignation as excessive excitement and intense dread permitted her to assume.

"Give me your money to keep," whispered Mrs. Close, as though the walls of the room had ears; "money is not safe in this house; but I know a place,—I can hide it for you: give it to me; I will take care of it."

Like one fascinated, Mina produced her purse, upon which the skeleton hand closed with incredible speed, whilst her eyes glistened at finding the prize at length within her grasp. She had determined to secure that purse from the moment she noticed Mina's involuntary movement towards her pocket. It contained a few sovereigns, some silver, an old coin; but Ernest Ivraine's wife never saw one shilling of the amount again: her aunt bore it off to the hiding-place she said she knew of, and kept it there truly safe, though not for the benefit of its legitimate owner.

Mrs. Close marshalled the girl back into the dining-room, as if she dared the baronet to meddle with any one whom she chose to take under her protection; and, though he greeted her with a withering scowl, he addressed no word to his son's wife upon her entrance, for Mrs. Close was too rich to come to open war with: she had gained the field that time; he meant to conquer by other means.

"You don't seem to like our fare, Mrs. Ivraine," he said at length in a withering tone; and she started at the remark as if guilty of some crime. Heaven knew it was not the coarse bread which was choking her, but a sort of suffocating despair. "You don't seem to like our fare," he repeated, "fastening" her with one of his keen serpent glances.

"I—I think it very nice," began Mina, who scarcely knew either what the viands actually were or what she was saying, "very nice; I can eat anything."

"Well, that's a comfort, at all events," remarked the baronet; "as you have, no doubt, been accustomed to a much better style of living than we can afford. There is no virtue equal to that of being able to bend to circumstances, eh?" and the baronet

swore in his heart it was one he would teach her before very long.

Mina bowed her head over her plate; no answer greeted his ear; but Ernest, addressing his aunt, observed, "She always eats little, I am sorry to say," which, he knew, would at once establish a sort of claim on his relative's affections; for, by half starving himself in her presence, he had induced her to believe him perfect amongst men. What a home that was for Mina Ivraine, where even the bare necessaries of existence were grudged her; where every morsel she carried to her lips was watched and commented on; where the inability to eat, the lack of natural appetite—that delicacy which, after a time, made her turn from their unpalatable food, and prefer going without food almost altogether to swallowing that—were matters for congratulation; where Mrs. Close exultingly noticed upon how very little nourishment she contrived to support life, and the baronet observed her increasing pallor and weakness with joy, hoping this abstinence would soon lead to death; where, when Malcolm, against express desire, came to visit his sister before his departure for India, she dared not ask him to stay for dinner, scarcely to sit down.

"Oh! Miss Caldera," cried the young man, on his return to London, when he went to tell the governess how it fared with Mina, "the sight of her and that house has broken my heart; I would have brought her away if I could. You can't conceive what a place it is: and that was the home she married for; one in a workhouse would have been preferable: but it was for me she did it, all for me, and I wished her. God forgive me!"

He was weeping: it was the first time Miss Caldera ever felt pity for him; but pity came too late to rescue Mina, who remained on at Paradise whilst her brother worked his passage out to India, with a letter in his portmanteau directed to Major Henry Ivraine. And this was the marriage, upon the occasion of which Allan Frazer thought proper to write and congratulate his cousin, and Cecilia indited her an epistle full of loves and darlings, wishing her all sorts of happiness, and trusting they should sometime have the pleasure of meeting once more. To have read the letters, one would have thought there had never been any coolness at Craigmaver, any variation of affection, any lack of friendship; but Mina was not to be imposed upon now: she was so engrossed by the difficulties of her position, that it is true she very seldom turned her

memory's eyes back to the Highlands; but, whenever she did so, she still remained perfectly convinced that Cecilia was a very unfeeling, dangerous woman, a bitter enemy, a relentless foe, who hated her for some vague reason, and whom she cordially disliked and dreaded in return.

CHAPTER III.

"LIFE AT PARADISE."

Two years passed by—how, Mina knew; perhaps some of my readers can imagine. No event broke the monotony of that dreadful period; it was one incessant drop, dropping of endless annoyances, too minute, too contemptible, for recapitulation; a constant trial of temper and patience, a ceaseless stinging of sensitive feelings, a sort of perpetual blister kept open on the mind, a kind of never-ending sorrow, without the luxury of a tremendous grief, without the dignity of one great trial, without the excitement of one mighty storm.

Mina's part was always bearing, Sir Ernest's always inflicting. If it had been a savage blow struck to her heart at distant intervals, with sufficient periods permitted to elapse between each, for the wound to close, it might have been easier to endure; for it is with the mind as with the body:

a severe dangerous illness, weakening though it may be at the time, still can be got over, whilst a slight malady always at work, ultimately saps the strongest constitution. Occasionally even a slight wall withstands a sudden rush of waters; but the action of a contemptible, insignificant little spring, ceaselessly oozing and oozing at the foundations of the mightiest edifice, eventually undermines and hurls it to the ground. Then people marvel that such great results are capable of being produced by such small means; and thus, when hearts are broken by paltry every-day occurrences, by constant vexations, so trivial as to be almost imperceptible to stranger eyes—by unkindnesses which never amount to cruelties—by taunts so adroitly uttered as to render recrimination useless and complaint impossible, the world wonders how it chances that one person can outlive a tempest of trial, whilst another sinks under the merest trifle. Yet we acknowledge that constant dropping wears the stone, and know a mighty blow is required to break it.

The world's prejudices and the world's wise saws are greatly at variance; surely there must exist some extraordinary misconception somewhere. In Paradise, however, the drop did double duty, for

it first fell on Mina and then on Ernest. Through her he was made to suffer,—a punishment which, perhaps, he deserved, but which certainly was none the easier to bear on that account.

Sir Ernest managed to sow doubt between them, too; he impressed his son with the belief that Mina had married him from purely mercenary motives, and that her unhappiness was consequent on the discovery of his actual position; and, day by day, the idea gained ground in Ernest's breast, and the distance betwixt him and his wife hourly increased; he became gloomier and more wretched and more reserved than ever. There was not the slightest confidence on either side, for part of Mina's trouble —and not the least part of it, either—was a determination she adhered to resolutely, never to complain to her husband, never to add to his sorrow by confessing her own, to bear all in silence, to die and make no sign.

If it had been in the power of mortal being to carry out such a purpose with a cheerful countenance, to endure the torture and still present a smiling face to the world; if she could, not merely have held her peace, but preserved her health and kept from pining away and moping and crying in secret, this determination might have been a judi-

cious one; but, though she had resolution enough to refrain from saying she was unhappy, to seem the reverse was a something quite beyond her powers to accomplish. She could bear patiently, silently, but she could not conceal the fact that she was bearing; and, without this last triumph can be effected over pain, whether mental or bodily, all other efforts are of very little avail: it is, indeed, the perfection of resignation, for, without that grand key-stone, the arch of resignation dwindles down to mere passive endurance, a thing which frequently does no good to the beholder and much harm to the sufferer. So Ernest never spoke on the subject to his wife, and she never spoke to him; but a great breach yawned between them: mutual confidence, the discarding of all sorts of doubts and fancies, the overcoming of timidity and fear and many morbid ideas on the one side, and of suspicion, reserve, and sternness on the other, would have filled it up; but, because neither thoroughly understood the other, each seemed to consider it a moral impossibility that any change of conduct or alteration of manner could lead to a better comprehension. They did not desire to learn, because both fancied they knew too much: Ernest, of the reasons which had induced her to marry him, and of the vain regrets

which harassed her; Mina, of the feelings dwelling in his heart, of the repentance she imagined he felt at having wed a portionless girl without his parent's consent.

So they both kept silent, and both were miserable. Many a man, under similar circumstances, might have grown to hate the woman for whom he had run such a risk; who, instead of aiding him to bear his burden, sank, day by day, under the weight of her own; who had made a fresh care, a fresh anxiety for him, a fresh sorrow for herself; who, from the first hour she came, made no progress in the good graces of the ruling powers; who proved a ceaseless bone of contention, a perpetual thorn; who, after wasting away for nearly two years, still remained a stranger, an intruder, an alien.

But, with all his faults, Ernest was not one of this stamp: anxiety, care, suspicion, distrust, all grew and flourished, it is true, but so also did love. Oh! if Mina had but known that, she could have borne all the rest; but she feared he repented, and that idea poisoned her existence, added venom to the old man's sneering words, gave effect to his sarcasms, power to his taunts.

Ernest had been so little accustomed to female

society, that the idea of being communicative and frank to his wife never crossed his mind; he never once opened his lips to her concerning his affairs, his hopes, his fears. He did not know that both his aunt and father had enlightened Mina as to his actual desires, informed her why he kept hanging on about Paradise, warned her of the small chance he had of his wishes being gratified, and told her that, when disappointment came, he would have no one to thank but himself and her; he did not know that there was not a threat or taunt his parent had not tried to induce her to depart; he only saw the whole of the results and a portion of the means; he could scarcely have conceived the point of view from which he was exhibited to her, the way in which she was represented to herself,—it was a living death, a wearing out of an unprofitable existence, a drooping, and fading and suffering, that two years' probation at Paradise.

Still she did not die, to Sir Ernest's inexpressible chagrin, to his sister's wonderment. How she lived, neither could tell; but, by some inexplicable means, she managed to do so. Janet, the withered domestic, and Janet's husband perhaps, could have given some useful information on the subject, about

medicines and nourishment and sundry delicacies, procured, Mina knew not how, and conveyed to her by the hands of the faithful housekeeper with such tact and secresy, that Mrs. Close never suspected her *protegée* was not existing on air intermixed, at remote periods, with small portions of food she compelled herself to swallow when in the presence of the baronet, who never wearied of sneering at her lack of appetite, and of hoping she would soon fade away to nothing and remove herself to the grave-yard at Lorton, where he trusted, ere long, to have the funeral service read over her.

For he feared the influence she seemed to be gaining over his sister's miserly soul; and he feared still more to take the decided step of turning her out of doors, lest that should irritate Mrs. Close and induce her to quarrel with him and enrich her; for, if Ernest were sinfully waiting for his dead father's shoes, Sir Ernest was longing as eagerly for his dead sister's gold-embroidered slippers,—money, money! to hoard, to gain, to grasp, to possess. That was the thought of the inhabitants of Paradise; Mammon was the god of that house. How sick Mina became of the sacrifices which were made to it, of the worship paid thereto, no words can describe; how she longed to go, how

she longed to die, how she prayed and strove and suffered, it would be vain to attempt to tell.

At length, to Sir Ernest's unutterable rage, a son was born, to be baronet after his father's and grandfather's demise; a son, to inherit the unprofitable entailed estate, to cut out Henry in the title, to prevent him or his children ever affixing Sir to his name and Baronet after; a son, to be a ceaseless obstacle to his desires, a triumph to the heart of his gloomy eldest born and to that of his pale-faced wife.

This was poor Mina's crowning sin: it was the last drop in her already overflowing cup of iniquity. His indignation could no longer be restrained, and he accordingly saluted the young mother's ears with such a frantic outburst of ungoverned passion as chilled the blood in her veins and froze the marrow in her bones.

She had never previously conceived such a tempest of fury; and the shock brought on, first, a nervous attack and then a slow wasting fever, and, for weeks and weeks, Mina hovered between life and death, between earth's sorrows and heaven's peace. The principle of vitality must have been strong, however, for at length she recovered,—recovered to a consciousness of her misery, to a

knowledge of her infant's death, to a conviction of her utter desolation, to pain and sorrow and agony.

That was the first great trial she was called on to endure in that house, and she abandoned herself to such utter despair, she so obstinately refused to be comforted, she sank so completely under the blow, she was so thoroughly prostrated by the shock, that even the baronet's rugged sister was softened by her grief, and not merely administered to her scraps of consolation, but also, upon one occasion, so far forgot her economy as to stand for nearly fifteen minutes striving to induce her to swallow some delicacy, which she had absolutely ordered Janet to prepare for the invalid (at Sir Ernest's expense); but Mina would not eat: she refused to do that or anything but lie either sullenly silent for hours at a time, or else weep and wail and sob, as though her very heart were breaking. There was a maddened bitterness in her grief, that Ernest could not bear to look upon, that even the baronet dreaded to behold, that caused some to say her intellect was affected, and others to believe, if an opportunity were given to her, she would commit suicide. But, at last, the fit passed; her sobs ceased; she arose and walked about the

house as usual, worn to an utter skeleton, paler almost than an ordinary corpse: she had exhausted her grief and her constitution; and all who looked on her said, she was merely waiting her time to die.

Ernest saw life could not last much longer, if some means were not adopted to secure the prolongation of that which assuredly was little of a boon to its possessor; and, perhaps, Colin Saunders' vehement entreaty of "Tak' her awa', for the love of the gude God, sir, tak' her awa' for a bit," had a share in deciding him to try whether a sight of her native land, and the air of the Highland hills, might not produce some good effect.

He would have done anything then to keep her alive; even run the risk of leaving his father's house for ever: so much more people think of the maladies of the body than those of the mind, of that which can kill than of that which can pain. He had resigned himself to the idea of her suffering for a time, but he could not endure the mention of losing her for ever.

What agony of mind he had passed through during her illness no one suspected, save Janet, the old domestic, Janet and Colin Saunders: it seemed to

have aged him years, that period when she grew so trebly dear to him, when she tossed and raved and moaned; and he watched beside her, frequently during entire nights, with no companion save his own sad fears and half frantic thoughts. He showed all his love by stealth, as if it were a thing to be ashamed of, a folly to speak of; and, because he did everything for her silently, because the affection he felt for her lay hid in his heart and was never evinced by outward demonstration, Mina fancied he repented his choice, and could not, would not, understand him. His soul was to her a treasury unlocked, a volume in a foreign tongue, an enigma unsolved. They wanted some kindly translator, some subtle, rapid interpreter of unexpressed feelings, some one blessed by heaven with sense and tact and goodness to open their eyes and show them both to each other as they were, not as they seemed to be.

"Do not keep her in that wretched place," Henry had written to his brother the moment he heard of his marriage; "come out to us and bring her with you, and we will try to make both happy: Paradise is no home for any woman. If you cannot make up your mind to India, take your young wife away to some cottage in Wales, and I will pro-

vide the funds for you to live comfortably, because for luxury I know you do not care. For my own part, I had rather have taken my dear Ellen home to the humblest cabin; I should have preferred begging bread for us both by the road-side, to dooming her to cross the threshold of that dreadful house. Let money be no obstacle, Ernest; it ought to be none between brothers, more especially where the happiness of a wife is concerned."

And a handsome order accompanied the missive, as earnest of its truthful sincerity; but the miser's eldest son had set his soul on winning wealth unbounded, and he would not vacate Paradise: he struggled still on for the prize; he almost sacrificed Mina in endeavouring to obtain it. But then he stopped; he wanted money now for her sake as well as for his own, and he could not kill her in attempting to possess himself of it. No, he would go away for a time to the Highlands; the doctors recommended her native air: well, she should have it.

"My dear sir," wrote Allan Frazer from Edinburgh, in answer to Mr. Ivraine's letter of inquiry, addressed to Craigmaver, "there is no place to be let in our neighbourhood just at present, from a castle down to a shieling; but that can make no

possible difference in your proposed journey northwards, as I know nothing which would grieve me more than to think that, so long as I have a house in the Highlands, my cousin should make any other in Scotland her home. Mrs. Frazer is at Craigmaver, and, as I have written to tell her of your intended visit, she will be quite ready to receive you any hour after the receipt of this: I shall be detained in Edinburgh for a few weeks on business, but will hurry to Craigmaver as soon as possible, to see my cousin once again and to have the pleasure of being introduced to her husband.

"Yours, very faithfully,

"ALLAN FRAZER."

Whilst Ernest was perusing this epistle, Mina was holding a brief dialogue with the solitary female domestic, who ministered to the wants of the inmates of Paradise.

"I cannot imagine, Janet," she said, "where or how you contrived to get all those things for me when I was so ill; I never yet had an opportunity of thanking you for all the care you took of me: but how did you manage? do tell me."

"Lor' bless you, ma'am," replied the woman,

"I did not manage at all: I had no trouble; it was all Mr. Ivraine's doing."

"My husband's!" echoed Mina, in a tone of almost incredulous pleasure.

"Yes, ma'am; ever since you came to the house, he has been striving to make matters more comfortable for you: it was little any one could do here: but still he was always asking me what would be good for you, or what I thought you would like, and if I fancied such and such a thing had been of any use to you. Many a time my heart was sorry for you both,—to see you wasting and him fretting: it would have made one almost cry to watch how he stuck by you in that fever, never leaving you for a minute, never thinking of sleeping, or eating, or walking, or anything excepting you. But, dear me, ma'am, I did not mean to distress you; don't cry, poor young lady! do not take on so; I am sure I had no intention of saying a word to hurt you."

"Hurt me!" echoed Mina, the tears pouring down her cheeks; "oh! you have made me so happy, so very happy: I love you for it;" and the baronet's daughter-in-law, moved by some irresistible impulse, flung her arms round the old woman's neck and fairly kissed her. She had never yet

managed even to touch the shrunken cheek of her wealthy well-born aunt, but she did press her lips warmly, over and over again, on the old housekeeper's hard, weather-beaten, coarse-featured face: she did not know why she could not avoid kissing Janet: but it was a sort of comfort to her to lay her head on the shoulder of any woman and weep there; and, as tears are decidedly infectious amongst females in all grades of society, Janet forthwith began to cry too, and water her young mistress's hair abundantly, whilst she enlivened and varied the course of the stream by moans and exclamations and sobs and ejaculations, and oh lors! and poor dears! and so forth innumerable.

At last Mina concluded her part of this performance, and, raising her head commenced,

"Oh! I never knew anything about that; I must go to Ernest and——"

"Oh! please ma'am," interrupted the housekeeper, "do not mention to Mr. Ivraine that I told you, for he never likes even the merest trifle he does to be repeated; and he might be angry, for he cannot bear to seem to make a fuss even about those he is the fondest of. I am sure the morning master Harry went away, he came back, after walking to the coach with him, just as if nothing

had happened; but we all knew that parting nearly broke his heart, for his very soul was bound up in him, and I have never seen a smile on his face since. He was always the same from the time he was quite a lad,—silent and thoughtful, never liking to speak much or have much said to him, and having a fancy for doing everything quietly and making no work about it. You won't tell him, ma'am, will you?"

"No," Mina promised, and the woman departed satisfied; but she did not carry away with her the joy she had unconsciously given: it remained to gladden the young wife's path for a time; and, if unfortunate circumstances had not arisen, it might have proved the first glimmer of a guiding light for ever.

She was still standing where Janet had left her, thinking about how he must care for her after all, and how, when he was so anxious for her to live, he could not be repenting his marriage as much as she had feared, when Ernest himself entered the apartment.

He came in with a lighter tread than usual, and Mina looked up to greet him with a happier smile on her face than he had ever seen there since their marriage. It fell like a ray of warm sunshine on

his heart and seemed to be reflected back in his countenance as he said,

"I have good news for you, Mina; I have made arrangements for us to go to Craigmaver for a little time: the change will improve your health, I hope."

She shrunk back at the words, and the smile faded from her lips, and her voice was absolutely tremulous as she repeated,

"To Craigmaver! do you mean to Allan's house?"

"Yes," replied her husband, with an expression of the most intense mortification; "I thought you would be glad: are you not?"

She could not throw him back then; she had recovered her usual self-possession; she would have given the world for courage to say,

"I can live or go happily anywhere with you, save there;" but how could she reject his proffered kindness, how could she say, "I had rather remain at Paradise;" what good reason could she assign for her repugnance to revisit a place, the very name of which had once sounded in her ears like the mention of some blessed isle of rest. She remembered what Malcolm had said about women never agreeing with each other; she thought that now she was married and ill and careworn, perhaps

Cecilia might be less bitter towards her; she reflected that time, perhaps, might even have softened and improved her character. She could not refuse to go; she could not resist the inclination of answering him as she saw he wished to be answered, even though her words were not exactly true; she could not overcome long habits of reserve towards him all at once, so the little sentence, "Yes, very glad," passed her lips, to be repented of in after days in bitterness of heart and in agony of soul.

But still, spite of her attempt at dissimulation, Ernest felt vexed and disappointed,—he scarcely knew why. He had, perhaps, expected her to seem rejoiced as he once, in other years, had beheld her, at the idea of revisiting that place, of seeing her own land once again. Allan's frank invitation had gratified his feelings, and, consequently, he came to his wife, anticipating some hasty expression of surprised pleasure, some joyful thanks, something very different from what he actually encountered.

Mina saw he was annoyed, and strove, by speaking gratefully of his consideration and trying to look what she had stated she felt, "glad," to soothe his ruffled spirit; but all would not do: the first reception of his intelligence had been unfavourable, and no after endeavours could remove

the effect that reception left on his mind. After a little, he went with a heavier step out of the apartment, and Mina dropped into a chair and wept bitterly. What would she not have given to be able to recal that interview, to have had a similar opportunity given to her again of unsaying what she had said, of doing what she had not done! What would she have given—what would she not have given? that were a better question. Heaven knows, opportunities of such a kind do not come so frequently in a lifetime, that any should be neglected; and yet half the miseries and misfortunes and misunderstandings in this world may be traced to permitting that tide to ebb, which, if taken at the full, would have led to peace, happiness, confidence.

I wonder whether, in the statistics of broken hearts and blighted existences, two-thirds of the number might not safely be attributed to "neglected opportunities,"—"leaves on the stream that can never return:" and, alas! who is there, when lying on the bed of death, that can deny that his whole career, from infancy to age, has not been one continued series of permitting the good to glide past his hand; of seeing the right path one moment too late; of finding that the bark he ought to have sailed in is one which, having just pushed off, he

could not jump into; of discovering the man he might have been of incalculable benefit to, was the one he hurried away from; of uttering words he had better never have spoken, and hiding feelings that it would have been well to display; of flitting past the sterling coin, in a disappointing search after its worthless counterfeit; of working for earth and neglecting heaven; of flinging great advantages from him and labouring like a galley slave to make disappointments for himself. Oh! the chances of existence seem to come at rare intervals in our impatient reckoning of time; yet there is not one in ten thousand who, at the hour of death, with light from eternity streaming in and illuminating his mortal vision, will not acknowledge, with bitterness of soul, that life has been unto him but one endless opportunity, neglected for good, improved for evil.

Bread of sorrow Mina Ivraine had cast on the waters, and, before many days, it returned to her again. For joy or for grief we are always planting and reaping. The husbandman takes heed of the kind of seed he casts into the ground, so that, when he comes to cut it down, he may not be stung by thistles or disappointed with weeds; and why should we sowers for eternity not likewise look to

the words we speak, the thoughts we foster, the feelings we cherish, the deeds we do, so that, when the great harvest day comes, we may not have cause to glance with dismay over the fruit which hath been brought forth abundantly, over the crop which the rains and the suns of many summers have caused to ripen and produce an hundredfold.

CHAPTER IV.

CRAIGMAVER.

It was a strange feeling which oppressed the soul of Mina Ivraine, as she looked once again, long, earnestly, sadly, away into the far distance at Craigmaver, thrice beautiful Craigmaver; for the sun streamed over the hills, and the mountains rose stern and solemn and grand as ever, and the dark firs remained immovable in their old positions, and the lake rippled, and the sound of distant waterfalls came on her ear just as of yore. It seemed as if the birds were carolling on the very twigs they had selected, as suitable resting-places, from whence to thrill forth the notes of their unequalled melodies, when she was a little child; the leaves danced in the sunlight, as if autumn's blasts were things unknown; the bracing air fanned her pale wan cheek; the trees bent their branches, as she knew they had always done; the wild flowers budded by the way-

side; the sky was blue and bright and clear, as she recollected seeing it one glorious day, long, long ago: externally, all was the same; but, internally, all was different at Craigmaver, at Glenfiord, in the heart of her who had been Mina Frazer, who was now Mina Ivraine.

"And so, Mina, this is your native land," said her husband, withdrawing his gaze for a moment from the prospect which his large melancholy eyes had drunk in, as if that panorama of beauty were a thing for which his very soul had thirsted; "what a lovely land it is!" And once again his glance wandered eagerly from point to point, from peak to peak, and then settled on the plantations, in the midst of which Craigmaver nestled, perched above the lake beneath the mountains. What a home it was! a home to pine and sigh and sicken for, even in a palace!

But oh! how Mina longed to tell him that she had rather live with him amongst the dreary Linconshire fens than with Cecilia in that bright, glad spot: if he had uttered another sentence then, if he had turned his face for a moment a second time towards her, she thought she could have explained some part of her heart; have told him the reason she was not "very glad" to see the Highlands

again; have contrived to make him understand how it was that, even whilst the memory of her childhood's home remained a thing stamped on her recollection for life, it had ceased to be a possession to sigh for, a loss to mourn over;—that, although she still loved Scotland and the Scotch, the heather, the moors, and the perfume of the thyme, which the wild bee sucked on the steep hill side, still she could live happily out of sight of them all. She wished to say something about the lesson she had learned out of life's earnest volume of instructive solemn truths; but he was looking at that prospect with a sort of dreamy enthusiasm in his face, which she felt she could not damp with a single sentence of her own more sorrowful admiration; and, ere he again thought of addressing her, a shadow was flung across the road, and, the moment after, Cecilia Frazer drew rein by the side of the carriage, and, springing from her saddle, flung her arms around Mina's neck and kissed and welcomed her home again, as if she had been a dear and only sister, unseen for years, but remembered always.

"And this is Mr. Ivraine, I presume," she said, when she could spare a second from the wife to notice the husband. "Mina, dear, introduce me;" but, before Mina could comply with this completely

unnecessary request, Mrs. Frazer had extended her hand and was expressing her unqualified delight at becoming personally acquainted with one of whom she had heard so much, and whom she felt so excessively gratified to welcome to their lonely Highland home. "It was so kind of you to come," she added, with one of her frankest and sweetest smiles, "so very kind."

Ernest Ivraine looked full into the face of the beautiful woman, who uttered these words in a voice so musical, in a tone so exquisitely modulated, that it seemed as if they had not been spoken, but sung. The baronet's son had never mixed much in any society; he had been shut out altogether from feminine association. In the London parks he might have noticed some handsome aristocratic faces; in Lincolnshire he had once or twice been introduced to country belles and noted beauties, or at least beauties who passed current for such in a spot so far removed from invidious metropolitan comparisons; but he had never before in his life been brought into absolute close contact with a clever, fashionable, perfectly lovely woman, who was determined to astonish the (to be) English baronet, and to fascinate and teach him the exact meaning of "flowers blooming in out-of-the-way

places," and make him remember one he had seen at Craigmaver for many a long day.

He gazed, not rudely, though intently, at her, into the depths of the large purple orbs, at the broad fair forehead, the child-like complexion, so clear, so soft, so fresh; he noted the waves of her unconfined hair, the chiselled perfection of her delicate features; he beheld a combination of grace, beauty, refinement, and intellect, such as had never crossed his sight before: and then, withdrawing his eyes, he felt that, spite of all, he did not like the mistress of that Highland mansion, the angel of that terrestrial Paradise.

Spite of her face, her voice, her smiles, her welcomes, the instinct of his heart made him take a distaste to Allan Frazer's accomplished wife; and those instinctive likings and dislikings are frequently more to be relied on than judgments formed after even long acquaintanceship; for reason may be blinded and penetration deluded, and sense beguiled, and watchfulness lulled to sleep; but that something which

"—— Comes to tell us
All that glitters is not gold,"

never deceives, never, or, at least, not once in a thousand times. Children and dogs, we are in-

formed, are seldom astray in their first impressions; they both — the embryo reasoning and reflecting beings and the unreasoning and unreflecting animals —jump to their conclusions by some inexplicable process, which, in the absence of a better and clearer light, we denominate instinct; and, sometimes in later life, this same instinct serves us wonderfully, and proves a safe and certain guiding star to light us on to accurate conclusions at periods when the lamp of reason is burning so low in the socket, or else glimmering so faintly through a misty shade, that, if we went by her light, the true path would very probably be lost sight of altogether.

In matters of liking and disliking, Ernest Ivraine remained through life a perfect child; he felt drawn to some people, he was repelled by others; not because of any fault or virtue he at once detected in them, but because of an instinct that assured him there was good or evil to be discovered in their natures: he took the entire affair on faith, and loved and hated without analyzing the causes which produced these very opposite effects. It was so,—that satisfied him; why it was so, he could not tell—perhaps he did not care to trouble himself with inquiring.

And so, in the present case, he found, to borrow a couplet from Swaine again,

> "Smiles repel him,
> Bright eyes turn his feelings cold:"

and, accordingly, even whilst he returned Cecilia's greeting with studied politeness, there was a constraint in his manner which caused that attractive lady to turn away half provoked, as she mentally exclaimed, "What a stick!"

But she was not a person to be disconcerted or rebuffed by a little formality, so she insisted on their alighting and walking up the drive with her, for they were now at the old-fashioned entrance gates; and she gave her horse to the footman, who rode a few yards behind, and bade the driver proceed to the house; and then, holding up her long riding habit with one hand, she took Mina quite tenderly by the other, "to help her along," as she said—"the poor child looked so very weak and tired."

She had laid herself out to be particularly agreeable to both; she told Mr. Ivraine of the pleasure she anticipated in being his cicerone to the most noted spots in the neighbourhood, spots noted either for their beauty or the historical interest attached

unto them; she seemed perfectly enchanted at the unbounded admiration he expressed when the view from the lawn first burst upon his sight; she was pleased and gratified to lead them through beds of flowers, by banks of roses, beside hedges of sweet-briar, myrtle, and lavender, under arches of starry jasmine, into the drawing-room, which no more resembled the drawing-room of former days than the garden resembled the quaint old *parterre* affair Mina remembered it when she was a child.

The stiff old-fashioned sofas were gone, the carved oaken chairs had been re-modelled, paintings and mirrors filled up spaces which, till their advent, had been dead blanks; ottomans, couches, and *fauteuils* made the apartment appear a sort of luxurious haven of rest: everything was covered in pale green silk, or rather with a material which seemed to be like Irish tabinet, a judicious mixture of silk and worsted, possessing the richness of the one, whilst retaining the firm stiffness of the other. A statuette or two relieved the sombre antique appearance of a rare ebony chiffonier; a beautiful piano, open, and with music scattered over it; and a harp, that most graceful amongst musical instruments, spoke of song and melody; a carpet, in which the foot sank noiselessly;—this was the

drawing-room at Craigmaver, and this was the style in which Cecilia, since the old laird's death, had furnished it.

Everything was done so well; there was such a tasteful blending of the old and the new, of the sombre and the cheerful, of ancient relics and modern improvements, of comfort and usefulness, refinement and ornament; such an absence of display, such a fitness and purpose in each chair and table and cushion and footstool, such a style and fashion and novelty about the arrangement and decoration and carelessness and fastidiousness of the apartment,—that Ernest Ivraine felt, for the instant, as if he had stepped into fairyland. No, no! he had never, anywhere, seen anything to compare with this, which Cecilia, in her light pleasant way, called her "sanctum."

"I am so glad you like it," she said, in answer to a remark from Mina as to the changes her taste had effected; "you see some people have a fancy for fitting up little odd nooks in out-of-the-way corners of the house, in magnificent style, and calling them boudoirs, and retiring there to be comfortable, leaving large miserable drawing-rooms for their guests, where no one ever would dream of staying a moment longer than strict eti-

quette demanded; but I said, 'I will make my reception hall my boudoir, and then my visitors will remain longer with me; I will not keep the only snug spot in the mansion for my own especial benefit and that of a select and favoured clique;' so we got upholsterers to work, and, after their departure, I exerted the little taste I possessed to remove the formal look they bequeathed it: they did their part, I performed mine, and I am so glad you like the result of our united efforts. I had quite set my heart upon its pleasing you; but I will show you something far more valuable and precious in my eyes," she added, speaking in a different tone; "you won't mind, darling, will you, coming to see my child, my little boy?"

There was a tender sympathy in her tone which, touching the softest part in Mina's heart, caused her, on the instant, to forget the annoyances of other days, and brought her feelings at once into unison with those of her cousin's wife. The two girls might have first agreed and then quarrelled; the gay young matron and the sorrowful orphan might have misunderstood one another; but it seemed to her impossible for two mothers not to be linked together,—to remain unfriendly,

resentful, unforgiving: and just as Mina, with a sort of swelling in her bosom, was attempting some connected answer to Cecilia's observation, the door was pushed open by little hands, and a child of about two or three years old came running in.

It appeared as if the tread of those tiny feet passed over Mina's heart and crushed a kind of virtue out of it; and when, after glancing slyly at the strangers, the boy buried his face in the folds of his mother's habit, the unbidden tears started into Mrs. Ivraine's eyes, and she caught Cecilia's first born in her arms and kissed him over and over again, without once remembering, as she did so, that she had formerly regarded the bright being who called him "son" as the unkindest enemy, the most implacable foe, she ever encountered.

"Who you?" demanded the little fellow, who, having been a "company child" and accustomed to living in public ever since he was taken to the font, had retained nothing of timidity, save its first attractive semblance; "who you?" and he passed his chubby hand over the pale cheek, and then glanced curiously at his mother, as if marvelling that any person could be so very different from her as was the new comer.

"Cousin Mina," answered Cecilia for her, "whom you are to love very much, and never teaze nor torment, and to show all your pretty toys to; and this," she added, seeing the boy's gaze turning to the baronet's son, "this is your cousin Mina's husband; make a nice bow to him now;" and, at the well-known order, the child made a very grave salute, with a sort of half solemn, half mock dignity, which brought only a faint glimmering smile over Mr. Ivraine's face.

"What a stick he is!" once again soliloquized the lady of Craigmaver, for the words, "And this is your cousin Ernest," had well nigh escaped her lips a few minutes previously; but, looking at that dark melancholy countenance, she felt that, even for her, to make such a speech would be impossible; and, as she was determined not formally to talk of him as Mr. Ivraine, she had pointed him out to her child's notice as Mina's husband. The Englishman piqued and provoked her; his unimpressible *sang froid* was not to be tolerated; his very admiration of their Highland scenery and indifference to her Lowland witchery was a source of irritation to her. Women and children,—he did not appear to think either matters of any great importance worth being interested

in, or taking much notice of. Cecilia vowed she would discover his vulnerable point, if he had one; she would rouse him by some means, make him smile or frown, be pleased or angry, ere very long: she had an intuitive feeling that he was not completely overwhelmed by her grace and loveliness,—so much the more reason he should be made to remember her. Yes, she would try, and, with Cecilia, to try was generally to succeed.

"I am so delighted," she said, "that you came to-day, so that we may have a little time together, free from those 'necessary nuisances,' general visitors, —Goths and Vandals, who come down in hordes to lay waste the comfort and pleasure of a domestic circle. Some regular 'company people' are to be here early next week, but till then I have managed that we shall be entirely free, free to go and look at caves and cataracts, ruins, castles, and mountains, Mr. Ivraine: you must be charmed with our Highland scenery; I think there is none like it anywhere."

And then she led Mina off to see the apartments she had prepared for her, and came down afterwards to dinner, looking so beautiful in a pink French muslin, that her cousin really thought she got handsomer as she grew older; and she

discharged the part, both of host and hostess, so well, made her guests feel at once so completely at home, devoted herself so unceasingly to their amusement, and appeared to forget herself so entirely, that Mina could have imagined her the most amiable being in the world, save for one or two little memories which would persist in recurring to her recollection.

Driving, walking, riding, sitting quietly by the open windows, or thrilling forth gushes of melody which seemed scarcely to have been poured out by mortal lips—gliding over the waters, standing on the lawns, making all sorts of fuss about Mina's health, insisting on her taking precautions without end, and persisting in forcing her to try remedies without number,—she positively appeared to forget that such an individual as Cecilia Frazer existed, and made herself, in some style, over to her visitors, transferred, as it were, all right and title in the lady of Craigmaver to Mr. and Mrs. Ivraine, for their exclusive use and benefit during the period they remained in the Highlands. Whatever they desired to do, she felt delighted with. Sometimes Ernest grew ashamed of the instinctive aversion he entertained for her, and attributed it to not having seen much of fashionable society, and, con-

sequently, feeling somewhat disconcerted with the ease of Cecilia's manners, the cleverness of Cecilia's conversation, and the style and grace and indescribable air of *ton* that surrounded Allan Frazer's wife as with a vapour.

And, besides this, the contrast between that beautiful house and his home affected him painfully; he began to think Mina would have been happier amongst those who seemed so fond of her than amidst swamps and fens and the people with whom she was forced to dwell. Cecilia treated her so exactly like a much loved sister, that he never doubted the sincerity of her affection, and grew graver and more thoughtful day by day.

Mrs. Frazer could not comprehend him at all, and a very bitter feeling of dislike was consequently awakened in her feminine heart towards the only man she had ever met who seemed perfectly indifferent to her manifold attractions; who, whilst always polite and courteous to a degree, still evidently remained uninterested in anything, save scenery and his own agreeable thoughts, whatever they might be. Cecilia found Mr. Ivraine an unfathomable mystery. The "company people" came and went, but still no perceptible difference came over him: she tried for an entire fortnight to find

out what he cared for, or whether he cared for anything; to detect what could please or anger him; to discover his vulnerable point, for she felt satisfied he had one: at the end of which period she got tired and provoked, and, besides, grew weary of "being fond" of Mina, and was just beginning to wish her visitors, who tied her to Craigmaver, at the antipodes, when relief and succour appeared; relief and succour,—yea, verily—in the person of Mr. Alfred Westwood.

CHAPTER V.

CECILIA BREWS MISCHIEF.

As we all know, "it is a bad rule that will not work two ways;" if it be an "ill wind which blows nobody good," it is undeniably a good wind which blows nobody ill; wherefore, although to Cecilia it was no doubt a matter of especial congratulation that a German Count, picked up at a West-end restaurant, had induced Alfred Westwood to stray northward, yet that event brought no end of trouble to the heart of Mina Ivraine. The gentlemen were staying at a rural inn by the water's edge: and, as the Count had a friend some few miles off, to whose house he frequently repaired, Cecilia—partly to gratify herself, greatly to annoy Mina—gave the Englishman a sort of general invitation to Craigmaver, of which Mrs. Ivraine's former suitor was by no means backward to avail himself—shyness and modesty having

never, even in his youngest days, been distinguishing features in the character of that estimable individual.

He had dined once or twice at Craigmaver during a previous tour through the Highlands—a tour previous to this one, though subsequent to that he had taken at an earlier period, when engaged in his unsuccessful effort in search of a wife. Scotland (some parts of it) suited him: he liked the polished society, the luxury, the aristocratic style of everything,—the mansions of those with whom, on that side of the Tweed, he was brought into contact; for Cecilia, on the occasion of his first visit, had given him letters of introduction to General Warmond; and General Warmond had furnished him with similar missives to various friends in different parts of North Britain: so, whenever the *ci-devant* clerk set his foot on Scottish ground, he found himself "translated into a different circle, and breathing a decidedly genteeler atmosphere than that of Wapping or Belerma Square, or of any London mansion to which he had ever been able to procure the *entrée*.

To say he would have sold his soul to dine with a lord, and hand a duke's hundreth and eleventh cousin, once removed, down to supper,

is to convey very little idea of the lengths to which his mania for "good society" could have induced him to go; for Mr. Alfred Westwood did not value his soul in the least: if he could have made money by selling it in a good market, he would; he never considered its welfare for a single instant, or permitted dread of its future prospects to influence him in a single transaction of life: no, he would have done a great deal more than that for good society—put his body and his purse in peril; and, therefore, we cannot marvel that he occasionally indulged himself in Highland trips and continental tours, and had built innumerable chateaux in Espagne, about the performances, and glories, and enjoyments of some indefinite period, when he meant to become a private gentleman, with plenty of money in his pockets, and live amongst those in whom his heart delighted.

Most people have their hobby—this was his; he did not ride it to death simply because the opportunity for such a display of horsemanship was never presented to him: but he did his best upon all occasions, and availed himself of all invitations the fates sent him, with an untiring perseverance that might have won admiration from a very hermit—and, accordingly, he came to Craigmaver

incessantly; and, from the hour of his advent, Cecilia turned over a new leaf in her book of conduct towards her visitors — the Ivraines to wit, husband and wife.

You could not have told how she managed to do it: but she did contrive to render the former uncomfortable, the latter miserable: even whilst affecting to praise and fondle Mina she let a drop of bitterness fall unperceived from her lips, and mingle in her cup. Ernest's pale-faced wife perceived the moment this began that Cecilia's nature remained unaltered, and she longed to be gone, and she urged Mr. Ivraine to depart; but, as she could assign no sufficient reason for her desire, as the change seemed decidedly to be benefiting her health, and as Mr. Frazer had not yet returned, although his arrival was daily expected, Ernest decided not to comply with her request; and she lacked courage and frankness to explain why she preferred it.

"What a cold dreary region of the earth Lincolnshire must be," Mrs. Frazer commenced one evening at dinner; "I thought we were icy enough here, but Craigmaver possesses a sort of tropical climate in comparison to that Mina describes as enjoyed by the inhabitants of Lorton; you had

better remain with us for the winter: it will kill my poor cousin to go back and be frozen to death there."

"Do you consider it so very chilly, then, Mina?" demanded Mr. Ivraine, in a perfectly indifferent tone, almost habitual to him; "I do not recollect hearing you complain of it before."

"Oh! you will never hear her complain of anything," remarked the lady; "she is, and was, and always shall be, one of the meekest and most patient, and long suffering amongst women. I am sure it must have been about Lorton those lines were written:

> 'No cheerful breeze this sullen region knows:
> The dreadful east is all the wind that blows.'

Who was it, Mina, composed the expressive couplet?"

"You told me the other day, when I first heard you repeat it," said Mina, speaking very distinctly, and looking appealingly at her husband whilst addressing Cecilia, "that Pope was the author."

"I, my dear?" echoed Mrs. Frazer, "impossible! You know I am not a bit clever, or learned, or anything like what you are; I can play a few

airs and sing a few songs, but, as regards book learning, I plead guilty to all sorts of feminine ignorances and short-comings: I never read Pope in my life."

"Neither did I," responded Mina resolutely.

"You might have seen the couplet though, without going to head-quarters for it," remarked Mr. Westwood ill-naturedly enough, though the sneer was not intended for Mrs. Ivraine: "for it is to be found in 'Walker's Dictionary,' if I recollect rightly, through which erudite work many other similar gems are scattered."

"I hope you do not mean to accuse Mina of ever having in her life required to look at the inside of a dictionary," said Mrs. Frazer; "*pour moi*, I had far rather use a word out of place, or write it in defiance of all known rules of orthography, than inflict upon myself the task of wading through one of those dreadful volumes filled with columns headed, 'Bea,' 'Gri,' 'Lui,' 'Tra,' and so forth. Grandpapa," she added, turning to old Mr. Gordon, of Locholen, who was one of the party, "was I not born with a natural aversion to huge tomes and learned treatises?—please say my shocking prejudice in that respect is an hereditary weakness, not an acquired habit."

"If you want to trace back the fault to me, and lay the blame on my side of the house, I believe I must plead guilty," said the white-haired old gentleman, who was worth five hundred editions of his granddaughter, superbly "got up" and elegantly bound though she might be, "for I never, since leaving college, have opened any work, excepting the Family Bible and my Prayer Book: the newspapers are my 'light literature;' and, I believe, if we read them to give us a knowledge of what is going on in this world, and the others to instruct us concerning the next, there is no necessity to puzzle one's brains with more: what do you say, Mr. Ivraine?"

"That, if there be no use in reading, there is pleasure in it, at all events."

"Never could discover the pleasure yet," remarked Mr. Gordon.

"But don't you see, grandpapa," cried Cecilia, "that Mr. Ivraine is a *savant*, and Mina a—what do you call it?—a genius: Allan always said she was. And now, to revert to my first proposition," she continued, addressing Mr. Ivraine, "will you remain the winter with us, and see whether our climate be more genial than that of Lincolnshire?"

"I fear," said Mr. Ivraine, with a smile, which covered much annoyance, "that we shall have to endeavour to survive the severity of even an English winter. It is extremely kind of you to desire a prolongation of our already unreasonable visit; but, despite the many attractions of the Highlands, it will be impossible to remain much longer at Craigmaver: I have important business at home which may not be neglected."

"Well, leave Mina with me as a sort of hostage for your return; I will nurse her and take care of her, and doctor her, and make her a new creature: to get her well would be quite a winter's employment for me. Though I am not a *bas bleu*, I have dabbled in medicines and looked into that important department of feminine science, cookery for the sick, — see how much better she looks already. If you lend her to me for the winter, I promise that, when you come for her in the spring, there shall be such an improvement that you will not know her. Please do give me back my cousin just for a little, a very little while;" and Cecilia looked so entreatingly at Mr. Ivraine and so lovingly at Mina as she spoke, that nobody would have credited she had been striving to vex both of them a few minutes previously.

"If Mina choose," began Ernest, but his wife hastily interposed,

"No, no! thank you, Cecilia, very much; but I had rather return: England is my home, you know, now, and——"

"Lorton your Paradise, and Mr. Ivraine your husband," interrupted Cecilia, with just the faintest shadow of impatient satire. "What a perverse little cousin you are, to be sure, and what a model of a good obedient wife; but, remember, I have not relinquished my point yet;" and, as she concluded, she took Mina by the hand and led her off into the drawing-room, when she commenced teaching her beautiful boy to dance the Guaracha, and kept up a perpetual hum and jingle of instruction and castanets, till the three gentlemen joined the party; then she would have them all off to the green house to see a new *Regina strelitza*, and some lilies, and a *Hoya cornosa*, which covered one entire side of the conservatory; but Mina was tired and would not go, so she left the child to amuse her, and carried the others away to the gardens in triumph.

"I cannot imagine," she remarked to Mr. Westwood as they walked slowly back to the house together, whilst Mr. Gordon and the miser's son

paused to watch the operation of sulphuring a wasps' nest which a gardener was commencing *con amore*, "I cannot imagine what Mr. Ivraine cares about; excepting scenery, I have never seen him interested in anything, and his passion for that seems to have died out. Can you discover anything for which he has a *penchant?*"

"For money," replied Mr. Westwood; "gold is the Ivraine fever, I understand."

"Yet I have heard him speak depreciatingly of it; and you know he wedded a portionless girl," she answered.

"True," he remarked, and walked on a few steps in silence."

"I never saw so unimpressible a being," said Cecilia, "so reserved, impenetrable, and, as the Edinburgh advertizers say about their houses, 'self-contained' a creature before: I had fancied, from his letter to Allan, that he was in a state of distraction about his wife's health; but no,—I have done every earthly thing I could for her, yet he seems scarcely pleased; and it is not that he thinks it impossible for too great attention to be evinced towards her, for when I have jestingly ridiculed her, just the least little atom in the world, to try if he could be roused out of his lethargy, or moved

to anger, he never interposed a word, but retained that immovable look and unruffled manner. I never saw any one in all my life who so perplexed me; he married for love, and he does not seem to care about his wife; he brought her here to save her life, and now he does not appear gratified she is so much better: I wish I could understand him; I do not like to be baffled;" and Cecilia looked really very indignantly and despairingly up at a bird flying away through the deep azure of that lovely summer's evening, as if it had any possible connection with the subject, or could suggest any idea to her fertile brain: she was marvellously ruffled, and Alfred Westwood saw it.

"Did it never occur to you," he asked, in a careless sort of way, "that he might be made jealous?"

"He! no," retorted Cecilia pettishly; "I should never think of wasting valuable time in attempting such an impossibility."

"I fancy he could, for all that," answered Mr. Westwood; "you might just try it, by way of an interesting experiment, you know."

Cecilia did not reply, but she bounded off into the house to see what her "dear little Mina" was doing. Her companion followed her grace-

ful movements with a sneer: he read her through and through; he turned over page after page in the book of her mind, and studied the volume with some curiosity and some weariness.

"There is not a great deal in her," he mentally exclaimed; "cleverness, hypocrisy, and vindictiveness are the leading traits of her character; but vanity spoils all: she might do anything, if it were not for that foible. Ah! vanity is the crying sin of women!" and Mr. Westwood, who—being perfectly free from the weakness himself—of course might be considered an impartial judge on such a question, ran his fingers through his hair and caressed his perfumed whiskers and looked approvingly at his faultlessly white hands; after which performances, he entered the drawing-room and accepted a cup of coffee Cecilia presented to him, with a smile so bright that no one could have suspected a dark heart lay underneath so fair and smooth a surface.

Yes, she poured coffee out for him and Mina, and subsequently for Mr. Ivraine, and tea for Mr. Gordon, who detested the Turkish beverage, "the only matter," he said, "he and his grandchild ever were known to disagree about." And then, after the cups and saucers had been removed, when

the light was just beginning to melt into a kind of transparent vapour, when her little boy had been duly kissed and despatched to bed, Mr. Westwood requested her to sing him one song before he departed, and old Mr. Gordon, snugly ensconced amongst the cushions and pillows of one of the remoter couches, called out,

"Yes, do, my dear; do sing something for us, Cecilia," having exhausted himself and his politeness with which effort, he dropped over into a quiet unsuspected nap instanter, whilst Mrs. Frazer turned towards the piano with a smile, which Mr. Westwood interpreted to bode no good to some parties present.

He had been watching her face like a barometer during the entire evening; and, as he knew the meaning of its every expression, he took that smile as a sign of impending mischief.

"I will get out of reach of the storm," he soliloquized, and sank into a chair beside the window, near enough the piano to overhear any words which might be spoken there, yet sufficiently distant to avoid becoming aught beyond a listener; "it will burst soon;" and, even as he thought so, the first clap of the tempest he had assisted to raise saluted his ear.

"What a pity," said the lady as she arranged her dress in graceful folds about the music-stool, and turned over the leaves of an Italian song, "what a pity Allan is detained in Edinburgh; it is so provoking: he will be so sorry. I suppose, Mr. Ivraine," she suddenly added, with a light laugh and in a peculiarly tripping tone, "I suppose, Mr. Ivraine, you never heard of the nice quiet flirtation your demure little wife and my dear clever husband had in the days of old, ere either was tied?"

Her silvery tongue had not glided more rapidly over this sentence than had her eyes from the face of Mina to that of the reserved Englishman; and it was with a feeling of triumphant malice she perceived the painful flush which crimsoned the cheek of the former and the dark shade that settled on the brow of the latter.

Mina noticed the change the words instantly wrought in the expression of her husband's face, and, scarcely pausing to reflect, she answered hastily,

"I do not exactly know what you consider a flirtation, Cecilia, but——"

"Now, now, my dear, do not begin to clear yourself; it is quite unnecessary: I am not in

the least jealous," interrupted Mrs. Frazer, still speaking in the same light tone of badinage, while she ran, with incredible brilliancy, through a chromatic passage.

"Indeed you have no occasion to be," rejoined Mina earnestly.

Once again the rapid fingers swept over the keys of the piano, and then their possessor, turning towards Mina, laid a playful hand on her burning cheek and said, half-laughingly, half-seriously,

"Not in the least degree jealous, dear cousin, not even the tiniest morsel in the world."

"No one need be so of me," returned Mrs. Ivraine, striving to suppress a sob which almost suffocated her; "no one in the world, Cecilia."

"A very proper humble speech for a good modest child to make," rejoined Mrs. Frazer; "but I am not so sure of that. What does Mr. Ivraine say?" she demanded, glancing suddenly at that gentleman, who, with folded arms and gloomy brow, had stood contemplating the countenances of the two women during the foregoing little dialogue; "what does Mr. Ivraine say?"

Mr. Ivraine said nothing: if he had been deaf and dumb he could not have treated her question

with more apparent indifference, for he never answered it, even by a look, as he strode past the chair Mr. Westwood occupied, through the open window, and so out on to the turf-like lawn, which commanded so wide and beautiful a prospect.

"Did I ever do you an injury, Cecilia?" reproachfully inquired Mina, not heeding, in the pain of the moment, the presence of the man whom most on earth she disliked.

"No!" responded the other, with affected astonishment; "why?"

"Why!" repeated Mina. "Oh! Cecilia, did you not speak so on purpose; do not you, cannot you, see you have done me a great one now?"

Mrs. Frazer coloured slightly at the words, but she quickly rejoined,

"Dear me, child, I am very sorry: I had no idea your melancholy looking husband was such a jealous creature; had you, Mr. Westwood?"

"Oh! he is not jealous; no, no," sobbed forth Mina, her self-command fairly forsaking her; "but I wish you had not said that."

"Well, so do I," returned Cecilia, "and, by way of proving my repentance, I will just put matters straight again;" and, so saying, she darted

off like a bird, ran lightly across the garden, and reached Mr. Ivraine's side in a state of utter breathlessness, caused greatly by affectation and partly by tight-lacing. She laid one jewelled hand persuasively on his arm, whilst she pressed the other on what she herself would have termed her fluttering heart; and being, of course, far too much exhausted by her great exertions to utter one connected syllable ere they reached the drawing room, she permitted her guest to remain in profound ignorance of what she required till she had him and Mina once again before her.

"Allan declares I am always saying or doing something foolish," she panted forth: "and my poor cousin here (see how pale the child looks now) is quite unhappy about the foolish words I spoke a few moments since: you must not be angry with her, indeed you must not; it was most absurd in me to allude to such a ridiculous matter at all; you must just consider it what it was—a heedless jest. You cannot think how unhappy I shall be if my little Mina is made uncomfortable by my want of sense and thought. I am sure I shall not be able to sleep if you do not promise to forget all about it: indeed, indeed, I shall be most miserable if these foolish words of mine cause

a single doubt to you, or tear to my husband's cousin."

"I regret, madam," said Ernest stiffly, "that you should have given yourself so much trouble about so slight a matter; you may rest perfectly tranquil, however, on the subject, for my wife has but little inclination towards weeping, and I have none whatever towards doubting."

"There now," cried Cecilia triumphantly, kissing Mina, "did not I tell you, sweetest, I would make it straight? Oh! indeed I may not, as Allan asserts, have much talent, or sense, or whatever you call it—what you have, you know—genius I mean, but still I never met any one yet who could say 'No' to the lady of Craigmaver,—not even your quiet, reserved husband here, Mina; so now, as my heart has set all matters right which my tongue put wrong before, I will sing you the song this little affair interrupted, and here, at least, melody shall prevail, and harmony be the order of—*my* home."

She raised her eyes for a moment to the face of Mr. Ivraine, then dropped the long lashes over them again as she moved gracefully towards the instrument; but that one swift glance told her she had succeeded in her endeavours: she had sown

distrust between those two; she might, with her thrilling voice, make harmony in her home if she chose; but with a few laughing words, uttered in a low musical voice, she had produced discord in their abode—brought misery unto both.

Well might Alfred Westwood affirm that woman never sang before as she could do; but music possessed no power to lull into repose the demon that had obtained the mastery over Mr. Ivraine's soul. The strains rose and fell: she poured forth perfect floods of minstrelsy, and then her voice died away in the softest cadences; she modulated and paused, and hovered and hung on sweet low expressive passages, like one endowed with soul and sentiment and feeling. Whilst she was singing the moon came stealing out of the east, and flung its pale light into the apartment, making Mina's countenance look of a ghastly white, and giving to Cecilia's a sort of unearthly beauty. As the last note of a simple Scotch ballad melted away into the still night air, the lady of Craigmaver removed her hands from the keys whence she could draw such melody, and, looking up earnestly at the face of the Queen of Night, she said, in the half-reflective, half-childish tone in which she was wont to utter such sentences,

"Only to think of all the things, and people, and places that quiet moon can see, and how calm and placid she looks notwithstanding. If we could only notice as much of the inner life as she does of the outer, how miserable we should feel: what a strange world it would be, Mr. Ivraine, if we were able to read the hearts of each other."

"We should learn little good from the perusal of some," returned the gentleman drily; "yet it were a consummation most devoutly to be wished that the secret thoughts of all of us could be laid bare, and there would then, perhaps, be less dissimulation, affectation, and hypocrisy in this world than is, unhappily, the case at present."

Mr. Westwood smiled grimly when this speech met his ear, and he mentally murmured—

"A pretty palpable hit at two present, and by no means a bad one either,—not that Mina deserved the blow; poor Mina! she would have been happier had she married me: I would have made her so, even though—— What an artificial creature it is," he added, as Cecilia answered,

"Very true; it is miserable to consider what a deal of deceit there must be in the world; I have never met with any of it: but, then, my life has been peculiarly fortunate—married and single al-

most unclouded by a shade. Pretty moon," she continued, striking a minor chord softly as she spoke, "pretty, cold, melancholy moon, how much of past enjoyment you always recal to my mind. Do you remember, Mina, how I taught you a certain form of invocation on those lovely summer evenings we went out boating—those evenings when——oh! dear me, what am I talking about?" she abruptly exclaimed, rising from the music stool, "what a foolish head mine is—I do forget so. Come, Mr. Westwood, and see this moonlight on the lake; ah! 'tis shining over Edinburgh just the same, where my dear good husband is: I wish he would come home: I wonder what can be detaining him;" and, as she uttered these last words, the warm night air breathed on her temples, for Mr. Westwood and she were standing amongst the flowers, contemplating the wild, grand, majestic scene which surrounded the last and sole possession of the Frazer clan—Craigmaver.

For a moment Mr. Ivraine paused irresolute, then turned as if about to follow them.

"Ernest," began Mina, the words coming entreatingly forth from her trembling lips, while she laid her hand on his arm to detain him, "Ernest, do not go: I want to speak to you."

Had that thin wasted hand been a noxious reptile he could not more angrily have shaken it off, while he said, in a deep stern voice,

"You need not, Mina: it is useless; there has always been a something between us: I thought, long ago, you never cared for me; I now know that it is so, and understand how and why it comes to pass."

And as he passed forth from that luxuriantly furnished room into the garden, rich in all sweet perfumes, where the moonbeams lay soft and calm and bright, Mina sank down on a chair, and, burying her face in her hands, thought, in the bitterness of her heart, that her punishment for one false step was falling heavy and sore upon her; for, even whilst she saw his affection for her changing, or decreasing, or torn violently away, a painful conviction stole into her mind that, in that lonely Lincolnshire home, separated from all other attachments, far from all other kindness, sympathy, and regard, she had learnt, almost unconsciously, to cling to and love him.

After a little while, Mr. Gordon woke up, and the group on the grass came back into the house. After a day or two, also, Allan Frazer returned, and Alfred Westwood's German Count having

wearied of the neighbourhood, that interesting individual repaired still further north in search of some more "good society;" but nothing caused any change in Ernest Ivraine's manner towards his wife. Externally, perhaps, there was no perceptible difference; but she felt the alteration sensibly: walking, driving, talking, musing, it was a constant, painful thought. Sometimes she hoped, when they left Craigmaver, matters would be different, that the effect of those words would pass away from her husband's soul, that he might care for and trust her again; but, no! when, at length, the Highlands and Allan and Cecilia and beautiful Craigmaver were all left behind, and Mina began eagerly to watch whether the cloud cleared off at all as they retreated further and further from that fated spot, she saw with dismay that the darkness was never likely to be dispelled, for the nearer they drew towards Lorton the deeper it grew: and now that the necessity for conventional politeness before strangers no longer existed, his manners became colder and colder, and his reserve increased to such a degree that, finally, he scarcely ever addressed a sentence to her; and she, lacking courage to explain the state of the case to him (and, indeed, such an explanation would at that period have

been worse than useless), relapsed into a melancholy moping being, who had no single hope in life—save to die.

CHAPTER VI.

A CRISIS.

From the moors to the fens—from the pure keen bracing Highland air, to the stagnating atmosphere of Lorton: what a winter that was to Mina Ivraine, rendered none the less painful by the birth of another child—a daughter, who was scowled on by Sir Ernest, and scarcely noticed by her husband, and in the way of everybody, and a torment to itself, and who had no place in any heart, save in that of its lonely, miserable mother.

She had requested it might be called Eliza (after her own mother), a compliment the baronet's sister imagined was paid to herself; and Mina never undeceived her, fancying the coincidence might induce her to look more kindly on the delicate stranger: but who can look tolerantly on an infant born with a natural genius for screaming?—it was a nuisance to the whole household; and often and

often the young mother carried it off to some remote chamber of the mansion, and, holding it tightly to her heart, she alternately strove to hush its cries and wept scalding tears over it—sometimes desiring to be quite well and strong for her daughter's sake, and more frequently wishing that they both could die together and be at rest. She had a tie to existence now in the shape of that little fragile being; but she was so extremely fragile herself that she felt she might be taken from it at no very remote period, and then—

"Oh, my darling!" she used to cry, "who on the face of this wide cold earth would there be to care for you?"

Sir Ernest grew furious at his daughter-in-law—he could not force her to go; he saw she was not likely to die so soon as he once expected; he detested her and her child; her very patient endurance of his taunts irritated him; meeting her in unexpected places trying to lull the infant to sleep, roused an angry vindictive feeling within his breast: he hated her—that was the grand summing up of all his feelings; in his very inmost soul he did hate that "beggared low-born girl, whom his son Ernest had disgraced himself by marrying;" and, if it had not been for the dread

of offending his sister, he would have turned mother and child out of the house, and let his son follow or not just as he pleased. But, happily or unhappily for Mina, dread of Mrs. Close did restrain him: for, although that lady's feelings towards Mina were none of the warmest, yet they were wonderfully amiable, considering her nature and Mina's position.

It spoke well for the latter that the two best friends she had in that abode were women: for, if there had not been something gentle and good about her, she could never have enlisted the sympathies of Janet, the old housekeeper, in her favour; and, had she not been (for her character) wonderfully improved and greatly amended in the art of bearing, she and Mrs. Close must inevitably have come to quarrelling—for the lady's temper was none of the mildest, her mood none of the least changeable. Yet Mina never flattered nor cringed down before her: she strove to be gentle and patient, and, heaven knows, many a weary ordeal she was forced to pass through; but she could not pretend anything she did not feel—admiration for virtues that never had existence, fondness for persons whom few could even have tolerated; she tried to pursue the tenor of her

rough path with a tranquil countenance and an unruffled temper: when she was taunted she answered not; when she felt angry and indignant she remained silent; when she was wounded she endeavoured to hide the pain. She felt sometimes as if she could have trod undauntedly through an army of similar torturers had she only been faithfully assured it was to the grave she was actually journeying with her infant in her arms.

That was a frightful winter at Lorton—the snow lay, from December till the middle of January, a foot deep on the ground. If Cecilia had been there she would have known something about the cold of that dreary house, which a cheerful fire never illumined, where lights never shone, which smiles never brightened.

"Due north," so said the weathercock morning after morning, till even Mrs. Close could "stand it no longer," and fell sick on the strength of it—sick unto death.

Though her malady was a fever, Mina nursed her through it: there was nobody else fit to undertake the task; and, to have looked at her, nobody would have thought she was fit either; but still we all know delicate constitutions will bear the

longest strain, and that no one lives so long as she who is always dying. Janet said Mrs. Ivraine was killing herself, and tried for two nights to supply her young mistress's place: but the housekeeper was soon forced to give up; and accordingly Mina nursed the lady almost to the very confines of convalescence. How she managed she herself best knew; but, between the invalid and the child, her helpless grumbling aunt and her weak puling infant, she had perpetual work on hand—work some might have considered sufficient for half-a-dozen persons to discharge faithfully: yet Ernest would not be mollified; he would not see how, for his sake, and for that of the sordid woman who lay raving there, his young wife was once again prostrating her strength, and striving to do more than nature ever intended any woman should. He stayed out all day: Mina never beheld him, excepting at meals, and frequently not then, for she passed most of her time in the sick lady's chamber,—either there or else walking along the interminable corridors, striving to lull her child to rest, endeavouring, with colourless face bent over its sharpened features, to hush and sing it to sleep.

With all her money, with all her sins and faults,

with all her power and position, Mina did pity Mrs. Close. To see her lying on the wretched bed, to hear her moaning and shrieking in delirium, to know she had not one true friend in the world who cared for, or would attend to her, to consider the indifference Sir Ernest displayed as to whether she lived or died, or rather to perceive how eager he was for the malady to prove mortal—there was something repugnant to every feeling of humanity about that house, and the ways and ideas of its inhabitants. Mina's heart grew daily colder with dwelling in such a region, and amongst such a set of people; it was not the chill of the winter's snow which oppressed her soul; it was not the icy hand of threatened sickness, of approaching death which caused the blood to stand so still in her veins,—no! it was the most intense disgust of this sordid existence; the vain striving to win back a husband's confidence; the positive certainty that he repented marrying her; the knowledge that she was an obstacle in his path: these things made her life a burden to her; induced her to desire that she and her child were lying at rest, that she might be done with earth's cares for ever, that the little creature might never live to suffer as she had done. Thoughts like these were her dreary

companions during the long hours she watched by the bed of the miser's sister; she had nothing agreeable to look forward to; nothing desirable to gaze back upon; no pleasant certainty to support her at that trying time; and, consequently, if she were a most gentle and conscientious nurse, she was also a most melancholy one.

Sir Ernest frequently informed her he did not marvel at Mrs. Close's tedious illness and long-deferred recovery; but that he should wonder greatly if she ever got better, so long as such a mournful, miserable-looking attendant hovered near her. Mina bore this and many other remarks of somewhat similar nature patiently—that is, externally patiently; but frequently her temper was chafed and her feelings insulted and her pride wounded, almost beyond her powers of endurance: it was a fearful trial of health, principle, and self-control; a long wearing probation, with no hope of an end; a night which seemed destined never to be cheered by a morrow; a slow torture and a constant sorrow; yet no doubt, as Miss Caldera might have said, "it did her good." But Mina, feeling nothing of the beneficial influence of this dreadful mental surgical operation, derived no comfort from the idea of being subsequently the better

for it. We can all of us note defects in our bodily constitution, but few perceive the mental disorganization. Mina was no exception to the general rule; and, indeed, it would have been difficult for any one, who had seen her tried day after day, to believe she required such a training,—to say, in sincerity of heart and earnestness of soul, "it is good for her." Spite of all her faith, had Miss Caldera been there, and possessed of the ability to afford her succour, she would have snatched her from that place and permitted her to run the risk of never being thoroughly subdued and tamed, sooner than allow her to endure that silent martyrdom from week to week and month to month, and so on *ad libitum*.

Mina thought her spirit was completely broken, that she had no passions left to rouse, no energy remaining for action; but the volcano was not yet quite extinguished; there was fire enough still in her nature to do damage to somebody, if the match were but properly applied. She did not know that, however; nor did any one else who resided in or about Paradise; so Sir Ernest sneered on, and Mrs. Close got, as Mina thought, a little better, and the snow melted partially off the ground, and February arrived, the bitterest, dreariest, most per-

fectly unendurable month in the year,—no one could possibly survive it, if it were not two days shorter than any of its fellows. Dear reader, let us be duly thankful for that! According to the new style of reckoning, January had been dead and buried three whole days, when one wretched, half-raining, half-sleeting afternoon, Mina sat by the side of Mrs. Close's bed, striving to keep herself warm with the help of a large plaid shawl, which she had wrapped closely around her shivering frame: there was no fire in the room; not even a solitary fagot burned on the hearth, to dispel the damp fusty smell of the long unaired apartment. Her child slept on a little couch she had made up for it close to her chair, and Mrs. Close lay gazing, with bloodshot eyes and pallid cheek, out at the dreary landscape, as well as the pattering rain driving against the panes of discoloured glass in the window permitted her to see it.

Mina had not thought her so well during the course of that day; but Sir Ernest's sister persisted so positively in declaring she was better, that her nurse was at length fain to believe the assertion, and so remained there watching the expression of the lady's face, as she looked away out into the gathering darkness, or rather into the

sort of semi-mist that was rapidly shrouding from view all objects at a hundred yards distance.

Almost unconsciously she began to wonder what subject it might be which was engaging her aunt's mind: was it money, or her health? the dread of death, or desire of the lucre of earth? was she thinking about the little churchyard at Lorton, wherein was situated the family vault of the Ivraines? was she reflecting about a time when money would be of no avail to her—of a place to which she could carry no hordes of useless treasure—of an eternity that, sooner or later, she must encounter—of the account she should have to render, because of talents buried in the earth, of opportunities neglected, of gifts misused? Was she thinking of things like these, or had her memory carried her back to other days, to a time when she must have been a child, when she had brothers, sisters, parents? Had she any tender recollections of those youthful days? Was the sound of a voice, the tone of a song, the pang of a look, flitting across her mind? Did any bright, pure, trusting face ever rise up from the depths of the past for her to gaze upon? Did any kindly words come back to her ear? Was there a single, soft, gentle, womanly feeling in her nature, or had

she coined all into gold? Was there a spot capable of being touched by mortal emotions, sensible to any pain, save that caused by the loss of a sixpence, which might be reached and gratified by any other means than the voluntary donation of a guinea? Mina leaned her elbow on the bolster and wondered about that woman's thoughts; she grew fascinated, gazing on her aunt; and Mrs. Close seemed to have become fascinated, staring out into the twilight of that miserable February afternoon. Thus half an hour passed away, and still no sound broke the stillness of that cold, comfortless apartment.

"Mina," said the miser's sister at length, abruptly, startling Mrs. Ivraine from her wrapt contemplation of the widow's pinched niggardly countenance, "Mina, I wish you would take that child of yours away now, for it always wakens crying, and I cannot bear to hear it."

The words fell—Mina could scarcely have told why—with the force of an injury upon her: complaints of the powers of her infant's lungs and the use she made of them were no novelties in the catalogue of her "daily trials;" but Mrs. Close's request annoyed her greatly at this particular time,—first, because the little apple of discord

was sleeping peculiarly tranquilly, and, secondly, because a train of musing, which had taken her for a moment out of herself, had been rudely interrupted and put to flight by the unfeeling remark.

"Eliza is very quiet, at present," she ventured.

"What a fuss you make about her!" retorted the invalid pettishly; "you study her comfort in everything, and never mine, never; but I want to be alone: I cannot bear always to have people about me, and you must take that child away. I won't have my private rooms turned into a nursery: you know I love quiet, and yet you seem determined never to let me have a moment's peace: I should like to be alone sometimes, I confess—yes, indeed I should greatly."

Without reply of any kind, Mina lifted her infant from its temporary resting-place, so gently that its slumbers remained unbroken, then moved sullenly towards the door.

"If I had left you alone a little time since,' she thought, "when nobody else would come near you, you would have been lying quiet enough now in Lorton churchyard."

Perhaps, in all her life, Mina had never felt more tempted to utter any sentence aloud than

the above; but she refrained, and, the irritation being but momentary, she had scarcely quitted the apartment ere she re-entered it, to ask if there were anything Mrs. Close required before she went.

"No!" retorted that lady, angrily; "I want nothing but to be left in peace: don't come near me again till tea-time; I wish to be alone for a little to enjoy the great luxury of solitude."

"That you shall, undisturbed by me," muttered Mina as she stole up a winding staircase leading to some long disused apartments, filled with lumber and far removed from the dining-hall where Sir Ernest generally sat. One of the smallest and most comfortable of these had long been regarded by Mina in the light of a sort of haven of rest: no one ever disturbed, or was disturbed by, her there; she was quite out of the way, in a sort of alcove or recess, divided from the rest of the chamber by boxes, chairs, an antique spinet, and some other rubbish. She might almost have remained *perdue* in that place, had the household been searching for her; and in that spot, on a pile of moth-eaten carpets, she was in the habit of sitting, holding her child tight to her heart, crooning songs over it, and kissing the face of the little being, in-

capable of returning such an amount of love, and totally unconscious that, without such tenderness, it would cease almost instantly to breathe. And oh! how Mina did love that fragile creature: the clutch of the impotent fingers, the contemplation of the meaningless face, the care of that—her second born—had a humanizing effect upon her.

"I do not know," she often said in after days, "what would have become of me then, had I not been a mother; I believe I should have gone mad, or else drowned myself."

Perhaps she would have done both; but her daughter was at once a fresh care in life and a strong tie to it; she was something to occupy the thoughts of that harassed mind, something around which to twine the feelings of a bruised and bleeding heart: the only calm portions of her existence were those she spent in that quiet apartment, singing, in a low mournful tone, the simple old ballads she had picked up under the shadow of Ben Lomond.

On the evening in question Mina retired to her dusty retreat in a far from enviable frame of mind; she drew the plaid closely around her child, and pressed it tightly to her heart, so that whatever heat dwelt in her body might be shared by that precious charge.

There was more affection than ever in her heart, and more of bitterness; angry resentful feelings swelled up in her bosom; tears of wounded pride, of intense passionate attachment, started ever and anon to her eyes.

"We are alone in this world, baby," she murmured, "all alone; they wish we were dead: no one on this earth cares for either of us; you are better off than I, for I love you and you cannot yet love me; but oh! how glad I should be just to take you to my heart thus and die: how quiet we should be, baby darling,—they would all be free from us then;" and she laid her cheek softly against that of the sleeping infant. She was herself, even in her sorrow and her tenderness, more like a child than a woman: as if she stood in need of sympathy and support, and lacked the ability to give either. She was so slight, so youthful, so delicate-looking, that it was hard to imagine she had passed through a sort of eternity of suffering; it was easier to imagine her a little girl nursing a doll than a mother taking charge of her daughter.

"A whimpering child," was the taunt Sir Ernest perpetually threw at her; and then, in bitterness of heart, she remembered when she had been one, and who loved her tenderly then.

Many and many a thought coursed through her mind as she sate there, little dreaming of the events which were advancing stealthily towards her, almost as rapidly as a quiet footstep that came stealing up the narrow staircase along the corridor, and finally into the very room one portion of which sheoccupied.

Mina held her breath for fear: she knew by a peculiar shuffle that the new comer must be Sir Ernest, and she feared his appearance in those remote regions with a lighted candle in his hand boded no good to her,—no good certainly if detected lurking amongst old rubbish in a place where she sadly acknowledged she had no business to be, even though that apartment did form one corner of the house of her husband's father.

A moment, however, served to assure her he had not come in quest of any feminine article, whether valuable or the reverse; and, if her child kept quiet, she saw no reason why her presence need be suspected; yet, even whilst striving to repress the sound of her breathing, the proverbial curiosity of her sex prompted her to look underneath the old spinet and discover what the baronet might be doing: for a moment it seemed to her as if he were merely grubbing for soot up the chim-

ney; but this idea was speedily dispelled by the sight of a box, which he produced from some unsuspected nook, and placed, preparatory to further operations, on the hob of a rusty grate, directly opposite Mina's place of confinement.

His back was towards her: so, feeling sure of escaping detection, she leant still a little more forward, and saw him try two or three keys in the padlock; one amongst them at length fit it: he turned it eagerly in the wards, flung back the lid, and the light of the dim taper he carried flashed on a golden surface: it was a treasure receptacle piled full of guineas.

Before, however, he could touch the attractive metal—before his skeleton fingers could possess themselves of a single coin—a shriek, such as Mina had never before heard, echoed through the chamber, and a gaunt, wasted figure, half undressed, sprang with one bound across the room, and, flinging herself between Sir Ernest and the box, threw her arms around the latter, as if to shield it from sacrilege.

"You shan't have it!" she screamed, "you shan't! it's all my own, and it's all I have; don't touch it—don't come near me."

It seemed as if the sight of the gold had roused a

demon in the miser's soul; even in her place of concealment Mina shrunk back appalled at the look of concentrated fury that convulsed his face as he seized his sister and strove, by the exercise of all the force he possessed, to drag her from the position she had so determinedly taken up: but in vain! she appeared to be suddenly endowed with superhuman energy, and retained her hold of that box, spite of his most violent efforts.

"You shan't have it, you shan't!" she still yelled forth; and the clutch of the emaciated arms tightened, and she flung herself now resolutely over the treasure, each time she repeated her one unvarying sentence.

"Shan't I! we'll see that," ground out Sir Ernest, with clenched teeth; and, taking her by the shoulders, he gave her a savage pull that dragged her and the box on the floor. Shriek upon shriek echoed through the mansion as she first flung herself at full length on the scattered treasure, and then sprung wildly up and fastened her wasted fingers in a vice-like grip round her brother's throat.

"Let me go," he gasped; "let me go, damn you, or if you don't——"

She was squeezing him so frantically that he

could not complete the sentence; but, while kicking and striking, Mina saw him fumbling for something, and the next moment a knife, sharp and bright, flashed between her eyes and the light.

Before she well knew what she was doing, Mrs. Ivraine had snatched the weapon out of his uplifted hand, and found herself standing face to face with the infuriated man, who having, with one desperate blow, struck his sister to the ground, turned to confront the being whom most on earth he hated; whilst, as if to add to the confusion, the infant woke up, and commenced a cry so prolonged and dismal that it seemed scarcely human in its sound.

"Curse you and your squalling brat," he burst forth; "what have you to do here? begone instantly. By the earth I live on, I will stop that eternal crying—I 'll make that devil of yours quit howling," and he aimed a blow at the helpless infant lying on its mother's arm, which Mina eluded by a rapid movement; and then the tempest of years broke out at last, and the woman's tongue was unloosed, and Ernest's wife, reckless and defiant, braved the wrath of her husband's father.

"Strike my child, Sir Ernest Ivraine, if you dare! only tempt me far enough and you will see

what I can do: only touch her, only lay the point of a finger on her, and I'll stab you to the heart; I am roused now, and I will tell you my whole mind. I have been wronged, insulted, degraded, here; you have treated me like a slave; you have taunted one as well, or better, born than yourself; you have striven to subdue and humble the daughter of a braver officer, a better man, a truer gentleman, than any Ivraine of your miser race ever was or ever will be. But the proud blood of my ancestors I feel tingling now through my veins, and I warn you not to rouse it too much; you do not know what a Frazer can do; I advise you not to tempt me lest I show you."

"In heaven's name, what has happened, Mina?" here interposed Ernest, whom the prolonged shrieks had brought hurrying from the dining-room, and in whose heart, at the moment, dread for her safety had revived all the tenderness of old; "what has happened,—are you hurt?"

"No! I am not hurt,—not more than I have been for years past. What has happened? nothing! I have only been speaking truth to your father for the first time; let me finish what I have to say——"

"Only let her speak another word, only encourage

her by a look, only ask for her to stay in the house another hour," thundered the baronet, "and, as there is a grave before all of us, I will cut you off, and leave you a beggar and a pauper on the face of the earth. Don't open your lips, sir: I have tolerated her presence long enough; only dare to side with your termagant wife, and you will see what the vengeance of Sir Ernest Ivraine is,—by heaven you shall."

Undauntedly Mina returned his furious glance; there was a settled, despairing anger gnawing at her heart, which rendered her careless at that moment of everything—regardless of every one. She stood there with a flush on her cheek and a light in her eye like that which had mantled and gleamed there in happier years; her figure was drawn up to its full height; rage seemed to have dilated her frame; and, with one hand clasping her child and the other raised and holding a glittering knife, she looked the very impersonation of a woman whom injury had roused to vengeance, and insult maddened to rage.

For an instant she remained mute, as though struggling for external calmness; but then, spite of an imploring look from her husband, she commenced,

"It is impossible for me now to undo entering this house: but I can still leave it, and perhaps, though late, I had better do so."

"I—I wish you would! I wish to God you would!" cried the old man, in a voice of such tremulous eagerness that it calmed her and caused a death-like chill to creep to her heart; but she had ceased to bear, and, having begun to act, played out her part bravely, steadily to the end.

"Do you hear that, Ernest?" she said, turning to her husband.

"I do," he answered.

"And have *you* nothing to say?" she continued.

It was the first time since their marriage she had appealed to him for protection; and, as she paused in vain for a response, she felt as though her last hope, her sole stay, were departing from her. She fastened her gaze on his troubled face for an instant, then looked at the countenance of the miser, whose features were perfectly convulsed with agitation and hatred: a swift pang shot through her frame, and, prompted by she knew not what impulse, this sentence came rapidly forth:

"Ernest Ivraine, answer me one question truly: are you sorry you married me?"

He almost wildly raised his hand with a despairing gesture above his head and convulsively uttered the solitary word—"Very!"

The colour faded from her cheek, the light died out of her eye, the knife dropped unheeded from her trembling fingers: the crisis had come at length; there was no one to help her, no one to save,—the crisis had come at length, and, as the conviction was forced on the mind of Mina Ivraine, she caught her child more tightly in her arms, clasped her with a passionate gesture to her heart, and then murmuring, with a sort of suffocating sob, the exclamation, "Heaven help me!" she slowly left the room, carrying her daughter forth with her.

A thousand contending emotions swelled up in her husband's bosom as he saw her do so. The old love had prompted him to interfere; the new doubt and jealousy had chained his tongue when his heart had whispered him to spurn money and protect his wife. Grief and tender memories bade him follow and comfort her; prudence and anger made him stay.

"I must not offend the old man," he muttered, silencing conscience, as men do, by smothering her tones with specious words; and thus he let her go

away alone,—out into the corridor, down the winding staircase to her own desolate chamber, with her own miserable thoughts—all alone!

CHAPTER VII.

OUT ON THE WORLD.

She would be no obstacle in his path,—he regretted his marriage; she would free him from the hated yoke as far as possible; she would hide herself and her child from the sight of the old man, who hated them both: in one word, she would go. Whither? She had scarcely a thought about that. A vague plan floated rapidly through her brain,—go she must; she could not stay another hour in the house.

Oh that she should have grown fond of him! that bitter words from his lips were able to cause her such suffering! If she had only waited to reflect, only stayed till she was a little calmer, till he was calmer and had the opportunity to explain; for he had uttered the word hastily and bitterly, and repented it long and sorrowfully;

but, just as in former days—if it had been in her power to do so—she would have thrust his love from her, so now she would not pause even for a moment, but tore her love from him, whilst the wild vehement passion raging in her heart rendered her perfectly incompetent to judge, to think, to do any single thing, but act.

And that she did very speedily; for, never pausing to reflect for an instant, she flung a shawl around her, tied on a close cottage bonnet, snatched up a mantle, in which she enveloped her infant, stole out of the chamber, down the staircase, and, in less than fifteen minutes, she was clear of the house and running breathlessly, in the darkness of night, through the grounds and among the plantations of Paradise.

It was little marvel that, when Colin Saunders arose and opened his cottage door to admit some one, who knocked lightly on his window pane, he started back with an exclamation of surprise, to find that the unwonted visitor was Mrs. Ivraine.

"Gude save us a'!" he ejaculated, in his broadest Scotch accent, to which he never now gave free vent, save when the very deepest recesses of his heart were touched, "Gude save us a'! what has happened, Miss Mina?"

"I want money," she said; "I know you can lend me some, and I know you will."

She had entered the house the moment the door was opened, and now stood in the centre of the kitchen, her teeth chattering and her frame trembling with excitement.

"Money!" repeated the Scotchman, whilst the old man's daughter gazed in amazement on the lady, "money!"

"Not much," explained Mina, "not much; but do not waste time, I cannot stay: I——" she put one hand on her bosom as though some pain stopped her utterance. "Give me money, Colin," she added, a moment after; "the child of Allan Frazer of Glenfiord begs it from the hands of a faithful friend."

"Miss Mina," the old man cried, "for his sake, for the sake of the good and the dead and the kind and the true, tell me what it's for."

"Ask me nothing," she returned; "I will neither tell you why I am going, nor where I am going, —give me money: surely," she continued, holding out her hand, "surely you will not refuse to give it to her whom you knew years and years ago, when she was Mina Frazer."

Colin seized that little palm in his; and the tears

coursed down his furrowed cheeks as he burst forth with,

"Oh! Miss Mina, my dear, dear Miss Mina, listen, for the love of the great God, to my words *this* time! Did I not warn ye before? did not I go down on my bended knees to try to turn you from your notion? did not I warn you of this place and the people in it? and many an hour since then ye have thought of what I said that day; I know ye have by the way ye avoided meeting me, or letting me look in your changed face,—I know it; and, because you know I spoke truth then, listen to me now. Don't leave the place; away back to the house before anybody thinks you are left it; bear just a wee bit longer: no woman should ever leave her husband; you, least of all, for he loves you better than I ever thought an Ivraine could love any one. Don't go, Miss Mina, don't! bear all they can say or do: you took the duty on ye, and ye ought not to shrink now,—it is right for you to stay beside him always. Never mind Sir Ernest or his sister; never heed a word they say to you, but try to bear on for *his* sake."

As if the speaker had stung her, Mina snatched away her hand.

"You don't know what you are talking about, Colin," she said wildly; "if you won't give me the money, I must go without: I know perfectly well what I am doing, and why I am doing it,—I would not stay now if they came and asked me;" and she turned as if to leave the house; but Saunders detained her.

"Dinna gang off that gait," he cried, "dinna leave me in anger or think that I would not be proud to count down money into your hand, though heart vexed you stand in need of asking it from one like me: no, no! it was na that, it was na, indeed."

"I know it," she answered; "but let me go, —time is more precious to me than money; let me go: not all you could say," she added, "not all the world could say, would turn me from my purpose; let me go, for I am not to be stopped."

"Wait, then, only till I get ye what ye will want sore before long,—some of the gold men risk their souls for;" and he dived hastily into an inner chamber, whence he returned, bearing a small bottle tightly corked up in his hand. "Tak' it," he cried, forcing it on her; "it's full, choke full, and, if ye want more, I have more."

"Of what?" she demanded.

"Of guineas," he answered; "It's a queer purse, but a safe one: and tak' Jessie with you too, Miss Mina dear,—ye canna travel the world alone: tak' her to look after the bairn; she will be no expense to you, and I can spare her, and feel thankful to think she's wi' you; she will serve you faithfully, —let her go."

The tears came streaming from Mina's eyes.

"No, no," she cried wildly; "I am alone in the world, and I must go out alone into it,—God bless you, Colin Saunders!" and, without another word, she sprang out in the blackness beyond, and sped away through the silence and solitude of night, to seek some remote destination, some vague uncertain home.

Not alone, however; oh! no: true feet followed her rapid flight, guided by the unerring instinct of faithful attachment. An honest heart panted after her in pursuit till she reached the margin of the sluggish river, along which, for a brief space, he knew her route lay.

There she paused for an instant, as if irresolute; as if the temptation thus presented were a powerful one; as if the desire to be speedily at her journey's end were strong enough to induce her to do even that.

"I won't speak to her," muttered Colin when he beheld her stop; I will leave her to God and her conscience: they will keep her right; I know the grandniece of the Laird of Craigmaver, and daughter of my old master, will never commit that sin—can never go so far wrong; will never lose sight of heaven a'thegither. Oh! Merciful Father," he added, "take the dark thought out of her heart without the interference of man."

It seemed to the old man's fervent faith as if his prayer were answered on the instant, for, uttering a low moan, Mina turned away from the river's brink and exclaimed,

"No, no! not even for peace can I do that,—I cannot kill her, or leave her behind."

"Or peril your own soul's welfare, Miss Mina," added a voice at her side; "as you turned from that of your own accord, turn home again now in the same way; ask your own heart if you ought to go; if ye are keeping your marriage vows; if ye are doing the right thing: think again: be advised, Miss Mina dear, before it is too late."

"He who looks into the secrets of all hearts knows I am at last doing as I ought to do, Colin," she answered; "I may not turn, I may never cross the threshold of that house again."

There are questions which even the most impertinent lips hesitate to ask; there are sorrows upon which the most common minded fear to intrude; and there are also griefs into the cause of which even the nearest and dearest and kindest and most sympathetic dare not inquire too closely.

The trial which had come to the breast of the young wife, was one of these; and, in addition to that fact, the generally insurmountable barrier of difference of station prevented Colin uttering another syllable of remonstrance, prevented his torturing her with expostulation, advice, vain regrets, curious speculations, or anything save silent pity. He quietly, sadly followed her now slower footsteps till they emerged from the demesne of Paradise and found themselves on one of the flat Lincolnshire roads, leading—so at least the stranger always hopelessly fears—nowhere. Then Mina paused.

"Colin, old friend," she said, "you must turn back now; I am forced to journey alone: good bye."

"Oh! Miss Mina," cried the old man, "can ye no trust me? will ye no put faith in me? In the days of the persecutions, my grandfather suffered all that the tyrants could inflict, and never flinched, but died strong of heart for his faith's

sake, and I could do the same; and, next to my God and, mayhap, my own children, there is no one comes so near my heart as you, Miss Mina: I would do far more than die for you; I would do any single thing in the world but commit a sin to make you happier: and yet you winna trust me,—you doubt my faith, Miss Mina, and you winna trust me."

There was a quiver in his voice, and, by the light of the moon, which had just come peeping out of the east, Mina saw how, as he pronounced the last words, his face grew pale and his lips trembled. He had uttered the above sentence, as he always did any sentence which was spoken more by the heart than the tongue, in his broadest Scotch accent; and there was something about that harsh familiar tone, that voice from the moors addressing her thus amidst the desolate fens, which touched every feeling of the lonely being's heart: it was a breath from *home*. Home! we make many for ourselves on the face of this wide earth, but we always, in the end, confess that, after all, there was only a single real one amongst them,—that which was created for us by others in the days of childhood; and the memory of it comes gently stealing over our souls in all subsequent times,

like mournful music breathing over the waters of a deep unfathomable gulf, that gulf separating the present from the past, which none ever are permitted to recross, save in dreams; which few ever would recross in reality, were the power to do so vouchsafed unto them.

Mina Ivraine would not have retraced one step of the weary road she had trod; yet the accent of that true Scotch tongue and the memories of days that had long lain mouldering in the dusty past, awakened thereby, moved her inexpressibly.

"Trust you, Colin!" she said earnestly; "see! if I were dying this minute, there are just two in the world in whose care I could leave my darling without a thought of fear, and you are one of them."

"Then let me carry her for you now, Miss Mina, for, light as she is, she is still too much for you," he replied, and tenderly and gently he lifted the infant from Mrs. Ivraine's arms, and took the burden of it on himself. Thus Mina left home and husband and hope and everything behind her; thus sorrowful, sick-hearted, weary, and dispirited, she passed forth from Paradise, accompanied, some portion of the way, by one true humble friend,—thus she went.

Meanwhile, matters progressed anything rather than agreeably at the house. During the altercation betwixt Mina and her father-in-law, Mrs. Close had gathered up the scattered contents of the box, and managed to carry it away (nobody ever knew how she found strength to do it) to her own room; and, almost immediately after his wife had passed out from his sight, Ernest was peremptorily ordered by the baronet to leave his presence, a mandate he instantly obeyed, retreating to the gloomy dining-hall and striving to obtain peace of mind by kicking a smouldering log of wood with the heel of his coarse thick shoe. But this performance apparently failed to produce the desired result; for, after a few minutes thus spent, he sprang from his chair and commenced striding up and down the apartment like one possessed.

"Repent!" he murmured, striking his clenched hand upon his forehead, "repent! Heaven knows I do; and, if I thought you loved me now, or ever had loved me, Mina, I would go to you and tell you why I mourn with so unavailing a sorrow for the misery I have brought upon you; but, as you married me for money, as you took all my love, knowing you could never give any in return, as you concealed from me the fact that

your heart—the only thing I asked for, or cared for, or desired—could never be given to me, you deserve to be wretched also. Fool that I was," he added, "to dream that a young girl could care for such a melancholy, plain, stern creature as I am,—one so unlike *him*, that confounded woman's handsome husband. I understand it all now: she fancied, as I was a baronet's son, she would be a grand lady: and I deceived her too, as she deceived me, by saying nothing. Oh! if I had subjected her then to that test, if I had told her all and left her free to choose, what a difference it would have made,—she would not then have been my wife; but I—I loved her so much, that I could not tell her for fear; and I do love her still so much, that I will now go to her and tell her, if she will only try to care for me, only strive to be happy, I will take her away for ever from this place, renounce all I have striven and waited and hoped for for years—all I wanted, first for my own sake and then for hers: I will take her away, do anything, if she will only promise that little thing—so little to her, so much to me—to try to love me."

And, as he concluded his broken sentence, he hurriedly advanced towards the door.

"Oh! sir," exclaimed Janet, flinging it abruptly open in his face, ere he had time to carry his design into execution, "oh! sir, where is Mrs. Ivraine? Mrs. Close has taken such a turn, and she wants to see her. Would you please go to your aunt, sir, till I find Mrs. Ivraine? she ought not to be left alone;" and, having delivered herself of this breathless sentence, the woman departed in quest of her young mistress, who was already far away from the place, far, far away.

There was something about Janet's tone and manner, the latter particularly, which induced Mr. Ivraine to repair instantly to his aunt's chamber. Entering without ceremony, he strode across the room to the side of an antique chair, in which the miser's sister reclined, panting painfully; there was a frightful expression in her face,—the features were distorted and the muscles contracted horribly. Death! the word was written as legibly on her forehead as though it had been traced there in letters of fire, and Ernest read it.

"Aunt!" he exclaimed, "aunt! what is the matter?"

She strove to answer, but an indistinct murmur alone escaped her lips; and her mouth became twisted and contorted, as if with the endeavour:

with the violence of the will contending against the obstinacy of the body. Her glazed eyes turned towards the door, and her nephew interpreted the look aright.

"Mina?" he said, and the dying wretch made a feeble gesture of assent.

He ran into the passage to quicken his wife's arrival: he forgot everything at the moment, save the presence of the great visitor, who comes sooner or later to all.

He called "Mina! Mina!" and, from afar, Janet answered him,

"I am looking for her, sir."

"Be quick, then," he answered, and was hesitating whether to go and seek his wife himself, when a sort of noise, hardly a moan, yet a little louder than a sigh, reaching his ear from the sick chamber, induced him to re-enter it.

His aunt was sitting bolt upright in the chair, and made a sign for him to come near her.

"I want—to—give—Mina something; I should like to give——" she mumbled indistinctly, laying her hand on a box at her side and striving to raise the lid, but her strength was not equal to the task. Ernest made a movement to assist; but, with a look of fear and distrust, she dropped

her arms upon the coffer, as if determined to protect her treasure to the last. Then, after one half-despairing, half-imploring look in his face, her head fell forward on the top of that golden hoard. For a moment Ernest stood appalled before the withered, wasted, sordid skeleton; for the miser's sister, hiding her face upon the hard cold surface of the thing she loved best and valued most in life, had passed from earth for ever: she was gone to render a strict account, in another world, of the talents she had buried in this; she was gone without giving Mina anything, though it was still a redeeming trait that the wish to do so had found an entrance into her soul ere it went away from that emaciated body, on its long last journey home.

But where was Mina? why did she tarry? She could be of no use now; still Ernest felt annoyed, alarmed perhaps, at this delay. He raised the corpse in his arms, laid it on the wretched bed, and then, feeling his presence there was unnecessary, he was hurrying from the apartment, when Janet met him on the threshold.

"Where is she? where is my wife?" he demanded, a sort of sickness stealing over him.

"I cannot find her," replied the woman. Ernest made but one bound back across the room to the

table, where a candle, long unsnuffed, burned dimly; he snatched it up, and passing the woman, who offered some remonstrance, with the answer,

"The dead need no light," he left her, to commence and pursue his useless search through the whole of that large dreary interminable mansion.

"Mina!" he cried softly in the lower apartments, —in a voice which, had she been within reach of its sound, would have drawn her forth from the securest hiding-place, sobbing and thankful.

"Mina!" he called, through the old lumber rooms; and "Mina! for heaven's sake, answer me!" echoed along the desolate corridors, and ascended the remoter staircases, even before his rapid foot had traversed them.

"Mina, my wife!" he almost groaned; and thus, from chamber to chamber, from story to story, from basement to garret, he rushed like one in a frenzy; then, when thoroughly satisfied she had left the house, he darted from it like a maniac.

The rain had ceased and the night was far advanced, and the moon shining high up in heaven, when Colin Saunders, walking sorrowfully home, met a tall dark figure wandering distractedly along

the banks of that sluggish river: the same idea had evidently occurred to all three—to wife, husband, and humble friend.

"She stopped just where we are now, sir," said Colin, blocking up the narrow path, and forcing Mr. Ivraine to make a halt, whether he would or not; "just where we are now; through the darkness I saw her, and she thought then of doing what you fancy she has done. And I stood back a wee bit, and I never spoke a word; and I left her to the care of the guid God; and I let her think, knowing she would never commit that great sin; and, after a while, she turned away and passed on, for the dark thought was conquered and she was saved."

"And where is she now?" demanded Ernest, choking with suppressed emotions.

"She is gone!" responded Colin; "gone with her infant in her arms."

"Do you mean," asked Mr. Ivraine, "that she is safe, that she is alive; that she has voluntarily left her husband, my protection, and this place,—gone to seek another home for herself; do you mean that?"

"Whether voluntarily or no I canna say," answered the man; "but she has gone away alive

from here: with a breaking heart, with a crushed spirit, out into the world."

The miser's son did not ask another question; he turned on his heel and walked back along the path to the house, as though by that simple act he could cut her off for ever; as though ceasing to search could erase her memory from his soul; as if seeking no further information could give peace to his tortured breast; as though by saying, "I will have nought more to do with her," he could undo the fact of their marriage, of her misery, of his love: he spoke no syllable; he made no comment; he demanded no explanation; he uttered no complaint: but strode gloomily back to his desolate home, rendered none the less desolate by the mighty, all-pervading presence of that giant spectre men call death.

They buried her quietly one drizzling February morning, when Sir Ernest, who would not go to the expense of mourning coaches for the funeral, got wet to the skin following the coffin on foot to the churchyard at Lorton; but he was so much occupied for several days after the interment, in looking out for various amounts of hidden treasure, in arranging papers and inspecting title deeds, and taking possession of his late sister's effects (for

she died intestate), that he had no leisure to think about a severe cold he caught on the day they laid her to sleep with her ancestors; besides which, he had a very pretty hornet's nest to deal with in the shape of any number of claimants—Closes and Ivraines—who all fancied they were entitled to a share of the spoil that death had cast in the way of Sir Ernest Ivraine.

There was much contention, great ill-will, legal threatenings, Chancery murmurs, hints of fraud, proposals for an equitable settlement, for some fifteen days, and then a sort of lull ensued: a mighty change came o'er the spirit of their dream, for rumours began to be circulated that Sir Ernest was dangerously ill; that Mrs. Ivraine had left the house; that Henry, though about to revisit England, had not yet returned; that Ernest was in disgrace; that fortunes were to be made and lands won by the most fortunate adventurer. No sooner, then, was it actually ascertained that Sir Ernest was confined to bed, than carriages, chaises, horsemen, and pedestrians besieged the gates of Paradise. If it had been heaven they were trying to win they could not have grown more pertinacious in the clamours for admittance; and Ernest, heart-sick and weary, merely looked out on the storming

party, and then, without thinking of resistance, surrendered unconditionally, and let the legion of fresh devils come and take possession of the house, in order to see if they could drive the old ones out of it. Alas! no; the last state thereof was worse than the first.

It was a dreadful place, that misnamed Paradise, where a man lay sick, and where all his kindred, from far and near, thronged to see if their hopes had not deceived them, whether he would die; a home unbrightened by love, unsanctified by religion, unblessed by friendship, unredeemed by virtue or truth, filled with sons and daughters of the horse-leech, who came with greedy, avaricious eyes from east, west, north and south,—a frightful tribe of mercenary wretches, of heartless legacy hunters, to watch the old man's last moments on earth—to see the miser die.

Ernest was now only one amongst many; but does the fact of such numbers running over the earth barefoot render the crime of waiting for dead men's shoes the less in one solitary instance?

CHAPTER VIII.

DEATH.

One dreary night, when no star glimmered in the dark expanse of heaven, when the swamps were converted into lakes, and mud was lord below, and a drizzling rain monarch above, and desolation reigned all around, a solitary horseman drew rein by the gate of Paradise, and, without alighting from his steed, groped about for the rusted iron chain which served the purpose of bell-pull. Having at length, not without some difficulty, succeeded in discovering it, he jerked it so violently and determinedly that a peal echoed through the darkness sufficient to have roused the forms of the departed from their graves in the neighbouring churchyard, had they slept any lighter sleep than that which, so far as this world is concerned, truly knows no waking.

But though that sound had no power to disturb

the tranquil repose of the dead, it immediately attracted the attention of the living; for, at the summons, the same person who had given ingress to the carriage on the evening of Mina's arrival years previously, went shivering forth to admit the untimely visitor: but, apparently, he was either no stranger to her, or else an expected one; for, without question or comment of any kind, she turned the key in the lock and bade him enter, adding also a caution relative to a tree which had fallen across the drive during the violence of a late storm.

"How is the baronet now?" inquired the new comer, springing from the saddle and accepting the woman's offer of a lantern to light him on his way.

Slowly and solemnly came the answer forth on the air of the winter's night, whilst the rain-drops pattered in her face, and her white lips trembled, partly with cold, but more with a feeling of mysterious awe: the air, which is filled perpetually with all sorts of falsehoods and evasions, uttered by the tongues of men and hearkened unto by the ears of their fellows, was charged with at least one great truth when she responded,

"Sir Ernest is dying."

The person to whom this information was given, made no reply; but, throwing his horse's bridle over one arm and taking the proffered lantern in the other hand, cautiously proceeded along the moss-covered avenue, which had never, for a quarter of a century past, known the beneficial effects of fresh gravel, and at length, by dint of perseverance, he succeeded in reaching—without having received any bodily injury by the road—the house, where his presence was most impatiently expected.

"I need not hurry myself," he had murmured, whilst endeavouring to make his horse leap over the fallen trunk of an ancient beech tree, the glory of which was departed for ever, "I need not hurry myself, because, if he die intestate, the money will be distributed more equitably than he could ever prevail on himself to devise it. To be sure, if he depart this life before I get there, I cannot, with any degree of propriety, make a charge, and so shall have my ride for nothing; but still I do not want him to leave his gold to those harpies, and there is no one thing in this world so beneficial as taking matters quietly—it is so much better than putting oneself in a fuss about nothing: and accordingly, carrying his principle fully into practice, he knocked leisurely for admittance, gave his

horse in charge to the man who opened it, added some words of caution in regard to rubbing the animal down properly, and shook the rain thoroughly off his own garments, ere he ascended to the room where Sir Ernest Ivraine was, indeed, as the woman had said, "dying."

For, at length, the only creditor whom he found himself unable to cheat was clamouring loudly for attention; that stern creditor, whose name is Death, who makes with all flesh such short accounts and such long friends, whose summons can never be disobeyed, the sum total of whose bill of mortality must be paid in full, without deduction or discount, had finally arrived in person to "square all up" with the old miser, and take him from the contemplation of his money bags for ever.

Up the carpetless staircases the attorney went creaking, along endless corridors he strode deliberately; tattered faces scowled on him from out of dingy frames ranged along the dark damp walls; the wind swept in sudden gusts through the passages, and then died off, in sobs and murmurs, in the remotest corners of the house; the rain pattered mournfully against the diamond-paned casements. It was a horrible place, and the stranger felt a chill

creep over his soul as he followed his conductress, an elderly female, to the death chamber.

"What a house to live in!" he had said half aloud, glancing askance at dismal chambers and narrow galleries, and wide, low, unlighted halls, "What a house to *live* in!" but, as the opening door disclosed the baronet's apartment and the goodly company it contained, he thought, "What a place to *die* in; such a set to die surrounded by!"

For at the extreme end of that large comfortless chamber stood an ancient bedstead, hung with faded tapestry literally in ribbons; and in that bedstead, by the dim light afforded by a solitary candle, the attorney saw that Sir Ernest Ivraine lay dying, eagerly watched by the eyes of all his connexions, who had come to see him expire and to hear what he would leave them. Like vultures from afar, they had scented the prey, and hurried from north and south, east and west, to be in at the death, to get share of the spoil: nephews from Hertford, cousins from London, a brother-in-law from Suffolk, married nieces from Durham, husbands with their wives, mothers with their daughters, brothers with their sisters, wild young men, hungry old maids, sordid calculating

bachelors, fortune-hunting parents, all flocked, at the first report of danger, to the spot; all came to see and judge for themselves, to plot and scheme and push and jostle; all gathered from far and near to speak to their "dear good relative" and try to screw, or wheedle, or snatch a few guineas: and some score pair of money-sharpened eyes, of all colours and shapes and sizes, peered curiously and anxiously from various positions at him, who, having comprehended them individually and collectively during life, now sneered sardonically upon them at death. Though they would scarcely, at that moment, have made way for a prince of the blood royal to pass, they divided in order that the attorney — who, to them, seemed more than monarch then—might reach the goal at which he evidently aimed, — Sir Ernest's side; and when the man of law stooped down to listen to a few words the baronet whispered in his ear, the looks of the anxious spectators became rivetted on him, as though he were lord and ruler of their several destinies for the momentous "time being."

"Sir Ernest requests to be left alone with me for a few minutes," said Mr. Medill, with an unmoved face and in a tone of true professional calmness; and the brief sentence struck a chill unto

many hearts, the owners whereof felt that the moment the death-room fortress was vacated, hope of any bequest must be abandoned also. There was first a movement amongst the group and then a pause.

"Pray go," murmured the baronet feebly; "I cannot make my will in the presence of so many, it confuses me;" and, by way of allaying their evident fears, and also of inducing them to comply with his request, he added, with a horrible distortion meant to represent, but which rather disfigured, a smile,—"Be assured I shall not forget you, present or absent."

This was enough: some, to win his affections by prompt obedience, stole instantly to the door on tiptoe, others moved forward to press his hand; but these the baronet impatiently waved back, exclaiming, "I shall see you again after a little;" and at length all, save Ernest, the attorney, and the baronet, had departed from the chamber.

"Do you wish me to remain?" asked the first, seeing his father's eyes turning towards him.

"No," responded Sir Ernest; and his son, feeling that wealth or beggary depended on the events of the next fifteen minutes, slowly followed his relatives to the drawing-room, where, around a

wood fire (piled high, and blazing—as no fire, for years past, had done in that house—cheerfully) they stood in moody groups, silently calculating chances, or else whispering what the old miser had said to each of them, and how they thought he looked, and what they expected he would devise unto them.

With one arm resting on the mantelpiece, Ernest Ivraine remained like a statue, looking into the fire and thinking—as he had done more than fifteen years previously, only with a treble portion of anguish—of his present, of his past, of his future. The hour he had then longed for was now striking; did the sound bring aught but regret with it? what *could* make him happy now? Not, assuredly, the event he had sinfully wished for in times long passed; not the death of him who had been his mother's husband, his father; not a barren title; not an encumbered property; not wealth; not an unmortgaged estate: if poor, he could scarcely be otherwise than miserable; if rich, he felt happiness was far off as ever. He had refused, in former days, to go forth boldly, self-reliant; he had stayed to inherit riches, which now, at the end of fifteen weary years, might be bequeathed to him, or might not: for money, he had endured; for it, she whom

he knew *now* how he loved had wedded him; for it, he had made her and himself wretched. It could never buy affection, nor peace of mind, nor joy, nor bring one moment of happiness again to the soul of Ernest Ivraine: he had thirsted for gold, he had cast all other hopes from him in his sullen pursuit of it; and now, when the fountain lay so near, at which, *perhaps*, he might be permitted to drink, he turned, half-sickened, from the contemplation, and felt that, to undo some portion of what had been done, he would thrust the draught, untasted, unwished for, from him.

He gazed, with his outward eyes, on the flaming faggots; but Mina was what he mentally beheld there, she who would not return, if poor; who should not return to him, if rich: her pale melancholy face looked steadfastly at him through the blaze. He once had longed for wealth for his own sake; he had then pined for it for hers; but now, wealth and poverty, it was much the same to him, for he had learned to love something better than self, or brother, or money, or lands; something that could never be dear to him again, that had never been attached to him, who had left that house and him and the chance of future fortune sooner than continue to endure the yoke,

which love, on her part, had never lightened; which, from the day of her marriage till that of her departure, she had borne reluctantly and detested always.

Oh! if he had been able to give her a happier home, to meet her with pleasant smiles, to talk to her without constraint, perhaps all might have been different; had he been more like his brother Henry —less gloomy, less melancholy, less broken-hearted —Mina would then have learnt to love him. Some vague thoughts like these swept through his mind, but even while they did so he thrust them from him with his usual jealous reflection,

"Why waste affection on her? she never cared for me, and never will; she married me for interest, and has reaped the bitter fruits."

Ernest raised his head indignantly as he muttered the words, and before him stood all his connexions, waiting anxiously, like unclean birds of prey, for the death of Sir Ernest, his father.

And he had been no better than one of them for fifteen years; his crime had been worse than theirs, for the tie which bound him to the miser was closer than any connecting one of those present. He turned faint and sick at heart, as the full enormity and meanness and baseness of that which Henry

had pointed out and fled from, long, long ago,—which his connexions were doing, which he had done,—struck home for the first time to his soul. And Mina, was she in like manner a sordid, mercenary creature, who had wedded him solely for money, and left him when she discovered they had mutually deceived each other? held something back which ought in marriage to have been revealed? Was Mina indeed a mere worldling,—a calculating, selfish creature? His mouth answered "Yes," but the love of his heart perpetually responded, "No."

Oh! it was only then, when it was too late, that Ernest Ivraine discovered how little money had latterly become to him—how much Mina, his wife, had always been: but still pride and anger and jealousy prevented his confessing that knowledge had come to him—knowledge of how fervently he loved her.

"If my father leave me a beggar baronet," he rapidly resolved, "we can remain as we are; if not, I will make her a handsome allowance, should she desire it, but never see her again;" and, having formed this brief stern determination, he resumed his dreary contemplation of the fire, making rapid strides now, when it was too late, in that heart-

lore which all learn at some period of existence or other, viz., that affection and friendship are the greatest blessings in life, and that gold cannot buy them, or supply their place, even for a single hour.

Whilst some score of relatives, near and remote, were building beautiful "*chateaux en Espagne*" on the slender foundation of some stray word, or thought, or look, Sir Ernest Ivraine—the individual who they hoped would, at the last hour, turn architect for their especial behoof, and give those chateaux the only thing they actually required, to wit, a solid secure basis on hard cash—was quietly settling his affairs, and their expectations, by a few strokes of that magical, and sometimes diabolical, instrument—a lawyer's pen.

"Is the room clear?" he demanded, as his son closed the door behind him. "Is the room clear?" and he strove to penetrate into the darkest and remotest recesses of the chamber; but the twilight preceding that long night which shrouds all earthly objects from mortal view was fast gathering around him, and obscuring the outward vision of the miser, who had for so many years seen everything but—good.

"Stoop down," he added when the attorney answered "Yes;" and, as if fearful of any lurking

spy hearing and defeating his last and only testamentary disposition of his property, he whispered in Mr. Medill's ear,

"I leave to the eldest boy of my second son Henry all my estates, and money, and houses, and lands, and mortgage deeds; to my eldest son Ernest what I cannot keep from him—a title and the entailed estate of Paradise, and Lady Ivraine if he can find her; to my relatives what they will scarcely thank me for—their own properties, and wives, and daughters, and husbands, and fathers, and fortunes if they have any, and my best thanks for this latest and most disinterested visit. Be quick now, and make it short."

The rapid pen flew over the paper, the only pause occurring when the attorney inquired if he would not leave Ernest enough to clear Paradise of its mortgages; but the baronet growled out so angry a "No" that Mr. Medill's white goose-quill received a kind of additional impetus from the word, and made better speed across the sheet than ever.

"The executors?" demanded the attorney, when he had almost concluded.

"Henry Ivraine and James Medill," was the response.

"Who do you choose to witness the deed?" asked the latter, turning over the leaf and writing his own name as executor, according to order.

"Call two of my nephews and my respected brother-in-law," chuckled the old man; "as in signing they can read nothing but the name of one executor, they will imagine they are down for a large sum of money, and they will only be mistaken, that's all, that's all."

There was a something so perfectly diabolical about the baronet's mirth,—so fiendish in his exultation at the prospect of their disappointment when he would be lying stark and cold, that the attorney, although he had made many strange wills, and stood beside many death-beds, felt perfectly appalled at this insensibility to the near approach of that which hath dismayed warriors and vanquished conquerors.

"Call them," repeated the miser, smiling sardonically, as if the whole affair were merely a capital practical joke; "they will consider it a proof of confidence: confidence, said I? Yes—that they won't cheat me, because they can't, or kill me, because they would gain nothing by it; call them till I see their faces—I wish I could see them when the will is read!" and the old man laughed

till Mr. Medill thought he looked more like a fiend than a human being, and began to wonder if he were actually one.

"You forget," he remarked, with a sort of loathing towards all parties concerned, "that you could take no more effectual plan of opening their eyes to the actual contents of your will, inasmuch as, if legatees, they could not be witnesses."

"True!" answered the baronet; "what a pity! well, ring for Humphries: tell him to bring two others who can write from the servants' hall. My grand relatives have supplied me with footmen witnesses in plenty; but make haste, I have no time to lose."

Tramping across the carpetless floor, the men came promptly; and, as they bowed severally and collectively with an air of outward respect to the baronet, whom they inwardly despised, Sir Ernest, death half-palsying his tongue, said, in his old imperious tone,

"Stand there: watch me read over this will, and sign my name to it; then affix yours also."

He pointed to a spot at the bottom of the couch as the position he wished them to occupy; and, at a look from his client, Mr. Medill handed him the document; and, supporting him in a half-sitting

posture, held the candle close to the paper, whilst the baronet read, or rather pretended to read, it over.

"You wrote all down as I told you," he whispered in a tone so low that the sentence reached no ear save that of him for whom it was intended.

"Word for word," was the laconic reply.

"And no more," added Sir Ernest.

"Neither more nor less," responded the attorney.

"Hold the light steady; don't you see you are dropping the tallow," said the baronet in a louder key; then laying his long bony hand on the paper, he continued,

"I acknowledge this to be my last will and testament. Give me a pen and I will perfect it."

Dead silence reigned throughout the apartment, —not a sound was to be heard, except the uncertain scratching of the pen on the paper as the miser tremblingly traced his name, "Ernest Claude Ivraine, Bart.;" but when he concluded he himself broke the stillness by remarking, "I never dot an 'i' nor cross a 't;' it wastes ink for no purpose If any one dispute the validity of this will, you can swear to my signature by that;" and, sinking back on his pillow as he finished this brief speech, he stared with glassy eyes away into the

darkness of the dreary chamber without a solemn thought of the darker eternity lying beyond.

"Sign here," said the attorney, turning away with a sort of shudder and addressing the men; and, at the bottom of the paragraph, "Signed, sealed, published, and declared by the said Ernest Claude Ivraine, Baronet, as and for his last will and testament, in presence of us who have hereunto subscribed our names as witnesses, at his request and in presence of each other," speedily appeared strange hieroglyphics, purporting to be the names of Roger Humphries, Hugh Symes, and John Leford.

"You can go," said Mr. Medill, as he looked at the blotted characters, for the instrument by them was perfected,—made a thing of law: to bind, to hold, to make, to mar, to disappoint, to rejoice. The old man had finished his last work on earth: not so evil in deed, perhaps, as many another he had planned and executed, but not one whit less vindictive and cruel in thought.

"Do you wish for your son or any of your relatives?" inquired the attorney, who would have preferred that some other individual should occupy his post; but the miser answering "No," he felt himself constrained to remain. Mean, and wicked,

and base, and revengeful as the old baronet was, he could not leave him to die alone.

Five minutes dragged slowly away; what a solemn thing it seemed for the one to sit and the other to lie there, dreading, waiting, listening for the approach of death. How tardily it came, and yet how swiftly.

Mr. Medill gazed all around the dreary carpetless apartment, at the tattered draperies, at the flickering candle, on the pinched and haggard face of him who soon would be a corpse. A horror came over the attorney's soul — albeit, he was neither a particularly religious nor timid man,— a sort of recoiling from this method of starting on the long journey, and watching in darksome solitude the expected summons of the ghastly messenger: he knew the miser was thinking, not of another world, but of this; not of the use, or rather misuse, he had made of his talents, but of how Henry's son would improve or squander them; of Ernest's dreadful disappointment when it turned out that he was left a beggar.

He knew just as well as if he had seen his heart what was dwelling there,—regret, not for having abused the great gifts entrusted to his keeping, but because he could not carry his estates

and guineas and title deeds and mortgages with him; sorrow, not for having cursed his children's lives, but for being at last compelled to relinquish all to the son of one of them; not a kind or good or holy thought, but angry, vindictive, sordid reflections. The lawyer's eyes became rivetted on Sir Ernest; they seemed fascinated to his countenance: truly, it was not by any grace or beauty of expression to be found there.

At length the old man, as if struck by some sudden thought, made a feeble sign for Mr. Medill to bend his head close to him; and, concluding that perhaps some further, and hoping that some better desire had occurred, even at the eleventh hour, to the baronet, the solicitor inclined his ear in an eager, though still rather solemn professional death-bed style, to the white trembling lips.

"There is no use in wasting the candle," gasped his client; "blow it out."

For a moment Mr. Medill felt too much astonished to obey; and then, ere he had time to comply with the request, born of 'the ruling passion strong in death,' a chill blast from the boundless gulf of eternity came sweeping through the room and extinguished for ever the faint mortal light that had flickered within the old miser's attenuated frame,

with just sufficient distinctness to reveal to view the utter darkness and meanness of his narrow soul.

CHAPTER IX.

READING THE WILL.

WHERESOEVER that which had given fire to the eye, purpose to the heart, thought to the brain, and life to the person, of Sir Ernest Ivraine, might have departed,—whether to peace or torment, happiness or misery,—one thing was self-evident to the attorney's comprehension, viz., that it had gone forth from his body; and, thoroughly convinced of that fact, after silently regarding the corpse for a moment, Mr. Medill closed the eyelids softly upon the staring sightless orbs, and then taking possession of the last paper to which that now lifeless hand had attached a signature, he left the apartment, where nothing remained of him who had darkened and clouded the mansion for almost half a century, save the rigid outward visible form of clay.

"Where is Mr. Ivraine?" asked the solicitor, as he flung open the drawing-room door.

"Not here," was the universal response. "How is Sir Er——?" but the affectionate inquiry was cut short by Mr. Medill's abrupt exit. *They* were nothing to him; why should he be civil or communicative to people he despised in his very soul?

Lights were passing to and fro in the hall beneath; there was a hum of strange voices, a hurry and bustle of new arrivals. Mr. Medill hastily descended the staircase.

"Where is your master?" he inquired of Humphrey, whom he encountered at its foot.

"At the door, sir, with Mr. Henry," was the reply; and the lawyer, casting his eyes in the direction indicated, beheld Ernest and a tall military looking man, whom, spite of time and change and exposure to a burning sun, he recognized as his brother, and a lady, whom he hastily concluded to be that brother's wife, enter the house together.

"One moment, Sir Ernest," said Mr. Medill, detaining him, and at the words the elder son started and turned pale; "your father is dead."

Time was when the new baronet would have asked the solicitor a question after such intelli-

gence had been communicated; but that time was passed, never to return; and, uttering a sudden exclamation, he turned and looked at Henry.

"Just too late," said the latter in a broken voice; "I had hoped it might have been otherwise."

Thus they met, who had parted full fifteen years previously: orphans, they ascended the wide staircase slowly, drearily, side by side. Nor bolt, nor chain, nor bar prevented their ingress into any room in the house; for he who had fastened the door so securely after the departure of his youngest born, had now done with locks and bolts and fastenings for ever, had passed to another state of things, where all his piles of earthly treasure could avail him nothing.

And the attorney buttoned up his coat, and drew his hat down over his eyes, and mounted his horse and rode tranquilly away, feeling that, as Henry Ivraine's son was the legatee, he had made the best of a bad business; and often he put his hand to his pocket, in order to ascertain if the all-important document were safe, and whenever he did so, he murmured in indistinct accents,

"Thank Heaven those wretches will get none of it, at any rate."

It was an affecting sight to see those three, the

two new comers and the new owner of Paradise, enter the chamber of death and stand contemplating the face of the departed. Henry's wife fastened her eyes on those pinched miserly features; she seemed to scan the icy countenance of the corpse with that earnest gaze, as if to gain therefrom knowledge of the old man's real character during life: she looked around, not curiously, but thoughtfully, on the appointments of the room, the glimmering taper, the cheerless hearth, the dilapidated furniture, the wrecks of former splendour, the traces of present parsimony and shabbiness; she gazed steadily on Ernest's stern troubled face; she turned towards the door each time a step passed along the corridor, as though expecting the entrance of some fourth person; but the person she waited for never appeared.

At last Henry, with a deep sigh, concluded his long sad scrutiny of the dead.

"He is not so much changed, Ernest," he said, after a pause; "not so much as I expected; not so much as you."

And the younger man raised his hand as though he would fain have smoothed away the deep wrinkles from his brother's brow, the unmistakeable traces of care from his face. There was sor-

row written in the countenances of both,—sorrow of different kinds. Henry could not comprehend why such a deep gloom should dwell in Ernest's eyes; why it seemed such an effort to him to speak; why his words of welcome had been uttered as if they were choking him; why he had greeted his beloved Ellen with such constrained politeness. There was something very wrong; something worse than the death of a parent he had never pretended to care for, must have occurred: and, missing a new face, he had expected to see for the first time, the second born demanded, with a sort of hesitation in his voice,

"And your wife, Ernest; how is she?"

As if the question had not been heard by him, the new baronet turned towards one who had waited somewhat anxiously for a reply, and said, in a low courteous tone,

"I regret that your first visit to this house should have occurred at a time which renders it impossible for me to make you as comfortable as I could desire; I trust, however, you will forgive all deficiences and believe in the sincerity of the welcome I now give to you, who are so dear to my brother."

He held out his hand more cordially than he

had done when Henry first presented her to him; and, as they all paused for a moment in the corridor, where the above words were uttered, the lady pressed his icy fingers in her little palm, and entreated so much that she might never be regarded as a stranger—that no apologies might be made—that he would consider her as a sister, as one to whom the joys and sorrows of her husband's family came as near as the pleasures and troubles of her own—that Ernest, grave and unimpressible though he usually was, felt won. He looked down at the sweet face of the speaker; it was one no mortal had ever gazed on without going on his way the better for the sight—pure, calm, loving, and gentle: if ever an angel dwelt on earth in the guise of a woman, that angel was Ellen Ivraine, who had come to the house of mourning, and who changed its aspect almost by her very advent; Ernest, her stern brother-in-law, scarcely knew how.

The news of his father's dangerous illness had met Henry in London; and, without further pause than that needful to leave their three children under the care of a relative in the metropolis, he and his wife started for Lorton, and travelled night and day till the goal was reached, till Para-

dise was gained—the old dreary home whence Sir Ernest had departed for ever.

Henry had, indeed, wished his wife to remain behind; but she, whose heart was capacious enough to feel for all, whose last thought was of herself, who always fancied her fitting place was where she could be of the slightest use, prayed to accompany him.

"Malcolm Frazer's sister," she said; "that girl for whom my soul has grieved, will surely be the better for some female companionship now. Let me go and talk to her in that melancholy house you have so often described: a woman always likes to have a woman near her in times of sorrow, sickness, and death. You say your relatives would not be friends to anybody; let me go and speak to her, she is so young."

So young she knew, for she had heard most of the story from Malcolm just before their departure from India during a long tedious illness, through which she had tended him as no one save herself could. So young! and so she went, meaning to lay the tired head of the elder brother's wife tenderly on her breast, and tell her to be of good cheer, and win her from her reserved sadness, and force her to confide in and love her.

She had looked in the hall, on the staircases, beside the bed of death, for a slight delicate figure, —for a pale, care-worn, melancholy face; she had listened for the fall of a light footstep; she had expected a greeting from female lips; she had waited for a sight of one whose unhappy lot she and her husband had often lamented: but nothing, save darkness, met her straining gaze along the passages; her brother-in-law's grave face was the first which met her at the door; in the chamber, whence so lately a soul had departed, she beheld nothing but the corpse of an old man with grey hair, and wrinkled brow and countenance, the sharp, clearly marked features of which were disfigured, even in their last unchanging sleep, by a sardonic sneer,—the same he had brought to perfection during life. None but masculine hands clasped her's in friendship; deep voices alone echoed in her ears; it was an elderly servant who conducted her to the apartments hastily arranged for her reception; not a syllable was said of Lady Ivraine, the wretched mistress of that miserable house; Ernest had never named her—had affected not to hear a question concerning his wife, had turned the subject with a look which forbade further allusion to it. Where was she? what had

happened? where could she be gone? what could possibly be wrong?

Henry and she speculated about the matter till they were tired; the former endeavoured to obtain some light, but Ernest was impracticable: he would not understand, he would not answer, he would not afford information; and, indeed, until the interment was over, there was so little opportunity for private conversation, that up to that time the new comers remained in doubt as to what had actually become of the new baronet's wife.

Rumours reached their ears from the assembled relatives of the lady's flight; but why and where, and how she had departed, nobody seemed to know; with whom she had quarrelled; whether Sir Ernest, lately deceased, had turned her out of doors; whether his sister was the cause of the rupture, or whether the fault, if fault there were, lay with Ernest or herself, no one could tell: the whole thing was a mystery, and so was the new baronet; Ellen Ivraine tried with all her might to get at the bottom of both, but was unable to do so.

"I suppose," Henry once hopelessly remarked to his brother, "it would be no use ordering these people out of the house just at present."

"Not the slightest," replied Ernest; "a regiment of horse could not clear the premises until they have heard the will read."

"I wish I had the command of a squadron and I would try the experiment," returned the other. "Then my father has left a will?"

"Yes," was the brief reply.

"Do you know anything of the contents?" demanded Henry.

"Not a syllable!"

"I hope you may be rich at last," said the younger brother, affectionately and yet sadly; "I hope from my heart you may, and that not a shilling is bequeathed to any of that herd below."

"And you, Henry——"

"I do not need it; thank God in heaven, I do not need it," the younger man replied, looking up gratefully towards the high throne of Him who had thus relieved him from the temptation of desiring a portion of the dead man's gold.

Ernest turned away, and a deadly sickness came over him; he had never felt the same sensation previously save once, and that once he now remembered was in Belerma Square, the morning John Merapie died years before.

Sir Ernest's funeral was professedly a private

one; yet the array of carriages following the deceased to the grave was, as his eldest-born bitterly remarked, a something "quite edifying." If to go to the very mouth of the tomb be, as many imagine, a proof of respect, the old miser must have been held in great esteem by every relative he possessed in the world, near and remote; but alas! it is in death as it is in life—the man with most money will always have the greatest show of friends. Yet the beggar, wept over by one solitary mourner, is frequently richer in that rarest of earth's blessings—the love of one true heart, than he who goes to his last narrow resting-place under the shade of nodding plumes, followed by scores of worldlings, who hide their sorrow behind fine cambric handkerchiefs that never wipe away a tear.

But the funeral train, winding down the avenue of Paradise, and along the road to Lorton churchyard, was a goodly sight; hypocrites and legacy-hunters might have been counted there by coachfulls; all the grand company went decorously through the ceremony; it was an "edifying" spectacle truly, to notice the array of black coats and hat-bands, the ostentatiously-displayed handkerchiefs, and the lugubrious faces; it was de-

lightful to see how slowly they drove with their "dear brother departed" to the family vault, and how rapidly they whirled away from him, after leaving him safely there, to hear the will read, and ascertain at once what they were entitled to under it.

On the old principle of "short hanging being the easiest," Mr. Medill kindly put them at once out of torture: he made no stops; he scarcely paused to take breath, but read through the last will and testament of his late client like a curate publishing banns in London, or a lad repeating his lesson in the country.

But when he came to a very speedy conclusion, a general "Is that all?" broke, with the effect of a congregational response, from the lips of most present.

"That is all," replied the attorney.

And then what a howl of disappointment, and rage, and envy, and malice, and malediction, and threatening, arose and echoed through that large dreary dining hall, where the baronet had been wont to crouch beside the smouldering fire.

"The will was a forgery; they had been duped out of Mrs. Close's money, and robbed of the baronet's: the deed was a fraudulent one; they

were the victims of a foul conspiracy, to which Mr. Medill had been a principal party;" and, accordingly, they rose *en masse*, and surrounded the solicitor, as though they intended either to wrest the obnoxious paper from him, or else tear him limb from limb on the spot.

"We have been duped!" they cried, as with one voice; "the will is a vile forgery!"

"That, gentlemen, is a matter to be proven elsewhere," remarked Mr. Medill, moving towards the door, but just directing one rapid professional glance towards the brothers, to see "how they took it."

Henry looked deadly pale; he was sitting in the embrasure of one of the windows, and involuntarily he had fastened his eyes on Ernest's face, as though apprehensive of the effect the unexpected announcement might produce upon him,—whether it would snap the bond that had hitherto bound them together, and withstood the changes of time, absence, and circumstances. Would this unjust bequest to his boy estrange his brother from him? —that was the question the solicitor read in the countenance of the miser's second born as he turned his gaze on that of the elder for an answer.

A sharp quick pang of disappointment passed

through Ernest's soul as he found his last hope of an inheritance dispelled, his last chance of competency shattered: for an instant his brain absolutely reeled, when he heard the result of fifteen years' servitude—beggary! the end of all his sinful waiting; something, not many degrees, removed from pauperism! when he discovered for what a bubble of the imagination he had wasted his own life and embittered Mina's! when he listened to the words that placed a child he had never seen,—a child who required no money, who was blest with kind prosperous parents, before him, before Henry, before every one, as the old man's successor,—which reduced him to the necessity of dwelling at Paradise a baronet too poor to live even like an ordinary country gentleman; a man who lacked gold sufficient to enable him to go forth into the world to try to forget his sorrows and himself; a person without a single cheerful or agreeable thought, doomed to drag out the remainder of his existence as he had chosen to spend the first portion of it; a lonely, desolate misanthrope, whose wife had left him, and carried her child away also,—and who was uncared for by any one, save the father of the boy who so innocently had cheated him out of his inheritance.

But then the thought, Can money buy love? flashed through his mind. If it were true, as he persisted in affirming, that Mina had married him for sake of the metal which, though yellow in its own colour, tempts man on to commit deeds so black that the daylight refuses to look upon them; if this were true, then it appeared that it was unable even to win the semblance of affection, for she had never professed to care for him—she had deceived him by saying nothing. What could wealth, then, do for him?—so very little, he confessed, that, spite of this final blow, he felt himself able, after the momentary shock, to turn towards his brother and take his hand, and press it in all sincerity.

"I wish you and yours joy, Henry," he said in a low tone; "may he live to make a good use of it."

"Oh! Ernest," returned the younger, "I am so sorry; I would it had been any other than my boy who stepped thus into your property; from my soul I grieve."

And Henry moved towards the casement, flung it open, and looked out: there was a film obscuring the sight of the brave officer as he did so.

"Do not let that trouble you," said Ernest, gently: "money, dear brother, is not, can never

be now, to me what it would once have been: it has no power to soothe some griefs—to mend a broken heart—to pour balm upon a wounded spirit: the curse of our race must never separate us, Henry; you are the only true friend I have in the world; why, therefore, should I grieve when fortune has only passed by my door in order to make a more satisfactory halt at yours; and, besides this, our desire is gratified: those clamouring harpies are disappointed—the prey has been torn from their clutches; only listen to them!" and a grim smile of satisfaction and exultant revenge stole over Ernest's grave face as he hearkened to the deafening clamour raised by the group at the door from which Mr. Medill was vainly endeavouring to extricate himself.

"For heaven's sake, silence them, can't you," exclaimed Henry: "it is like the yelling of demons—they drive me frantic: you are sole owner of Paradise now, clear the premises."

"Gentlemen," began Ernest, stepping towards the circle, and, like oil poured on trouble waters, that word produced a lull: he was equally injured with them, and they waited to hear what further he had to say: "Am I correct in my belief that the visit with which, uninvited, you have honoured

this house was paid not to me but to my late father"——

"We came to see my brother-in-law," began the spokesman, the husband of a deceased sister of the late baronet.

"Precisely so," continued Ernest: "you came to see him, and you remained to see what he would leave you. The latter point being now fully ascertained, and his death having removed the necessity for any prolongation of your stay, may I beg that you will, at your earliest convenience, leave the house, of which I am now master; and that, whilst you do remain, you will conduct yourselves in a manner beseeming a home you never contributed to render less gloomy to me, and which is now a place of mourning: this disgraceful altercation is extremely painful both to my brother and myself, and I must therefore request you to excuse our retiring from the apartment."

He opened the door as he spoke, and held it so for Henry to pass out.

"But we have been robbed, we have been deceived," they cried.

"Robbed by whom?" demanded Ernest, scornfully: "by a man who, after fifteen years' absence, returned home to hear his father was dead? by a

solicitor of standing and reputation, who cannot, by human possibility, be benefited by the transaction? Perhaps you feel yourselves injured by me, whom this will leaves an absolute pauper! No, no: deceived you may have been by your own absurd visions, and wild expectations, but for that you have no one to blame but yourselves."

"The will is a fraudulent one," the brother-in-law said doggedly.

"Prove it," replied Ernest; "and argue and wrangle about it till doomsday if you will, but not here, nor in my presence. I beg you will no longer intrude on the privacy of my house; and have the honour to bid you all farewell, and to wish you pleasant journeys to your respective homes. Mr. Medill, will you favour me with a few minutes' conversation:" and the baronet, gravely and contemptuously inclining his head to his kindred, passed out into the hall, followed by the solicitor, who forced his way through the malcontents, and felt thankful to find himself alone with the new Sir Ernest, secure from further molestation or annoyance.

"I had nothing particular to say to you," said the latter; "but thought it was a charity to free you from them."

"I hope," began the attorney, "you acquit me

of all blame in the matter; believe me, I had much rather have drawn out a more equitable deed, but I was merely an instrument."

"Strong enough to overthrow the air castles of a score of brains," remarked Ernest, with a smile: "do not imagine I am offended; no, no, Mr. Medill; Henry has more need of money than I, and his son cannot do otherwise than make a good use of it: sit down and take some lunch; I am sure you must feel exhausted with the stormy discussion;" and as he arose to ring the bell for refreshments, the attorney's keen eye followed him to detect whether this were reality, not acting.

He read sorrow and scorn—grief, regret, and contempt—in the face of the stern grave man; but no hypocrisy.

"He is better than I thought him," soliloquized the solicitor; and it was true: Ernest Ivraine was better than many thought him,—than you perhaps, dear reader, have occasionally felt tempted to consider him.

Meanwhile Henry had gone to tell his wife that their son had supplanted his brother; and even the proud heart of the mother could not prevent the just soul of the woman lamenting that a more equal division had not been made.

"What a pity," she said, when Henry explained to her that he had no power over the money, that no means of reparation lay in his hands, "what a pity my fortune is tied up, or you could have given him it, you know, Henry."

"And our other children, Ellen," he suggested.

"You could have worked, and we would both have saved for them. Poor Ernest! I wish he were more happily situated."

"It is something worse, and yet still something better than money, which oppresses him," answered Henry; "not the love of gold, but the love of his wife: I wish he would explain that affair to me; I cannot get him even to name her."

"I am surely not a stranger to him, now," said Ellen Ivraine; "I am his sister; I am your wife: I will ask him about that desolate creature, whose heart must have been broken here. Oh, Henry! think of what a life she must have led amongst them!" and the gentle lady looked around the dreary apartment and then out on the swampy earth, and, contrasting her own happier lot with poor Mina's, breathed a compassionate sigh for one whom she had never personally known, but whom she had long pitied.

That evening, when all the clamorous guests had departed, when the shadows fell darkly on the walls of the tenantless apartments, when no voices echoed along the galleries, when the place had relapsed into its previous death-like stillness, and Ernest Ivraine stood moodily contemplating the logs of blazing, crackling wood, whilst the flames went leaping and dancing up the wide chimney, as if rejoicing at the opportunity afforded them for this unwonted display,—a quiet step came stealing across the room, a small soft hand was laid on his arm, and a face like that of an angel from heaven looked up entreatingly and sympathizingly in his countenance, whilst a voice, low and sweet, uttered the words,

"Tell me about your wife, Ernest."

"Wife!" he repeated, striving to free himself, but the slender fingers were not to be unloosed, excepting by violence, and so he was compelled to remain quiet. "Wife—I have none!"

"She is not dead?" said the lady.

"Dead to me!" was the abrupt reply.

"Where is she?" demanded his sister-in-law. "*I* want to go and see her."

"I know nothing of her," he responded gloomily; "nothing; her place of abode is a mystery to me,—

one which I do not desire to solve: let us talk no more of her."

"Don't think me intrusive, Ernest," said the lady; "only answer one other question, and I ask no more,—what came between you? what made her go?"

"Knowledge came to both of us," he answered in a suppressed voice, and speaking as if the steady gaze of those calm truthful eyes forced him to do so; "knowledge came to both of us,—to me of what she had married for,—to her of what she had married to: she could not bear her portion of the common sorrow; she found that it was difficult to endure the misery of this house for the sake of a man she never loved: so we parted, or rather so she went, and I have now no wife, no child, no hopes, no anything."

"Save a brother and a sister," she added, looking sorrowfully into his troubled face; and from that time forth she strove to win him from his griefs, to gain his confidence, to understand his character, to learn more of his wife; in silence she worked, as the good and the true always work,—but for long no result crowned her efforts with success. She persuaded him to return with them to London, to mingle more in society, to become acquainted

with most of her relatives, to visit, and drag himself away for a period from Paradise. Yet still, when—towards the end of the summer—they all returned there together, to enable the brothers to complete some business arrangements, the gloom on the brow of the elder was deep as ever; there was no great change, save perhaps in his bodily health, which seemed failing.

He said one day to Henry that he fancied, before the latter returned to India, he would be "Sir," vice Ernest deceased, and continued,

"When we are both dead, Harry, your eldest born will be a rich baronet; I am glad he is called Ernest, though it was my father's name:" but his brother seemed so grieved at the very allusion to such a possibility, that the subject was never mentioned again; only it made Ellen Ivraine watch him with double solicitude, and write more urgently than ever to India for any information, even the faintest, which might enable her to trace the poor fugitive, who would have been welcomed so eagerly home.

And no event worth narrating took place about Paradise until, in the first week of the month of August following the demise of Sir Ernest Claude Ivraine, Colin Saunders received a letter from his

daughter, informing him, amongst other less important affairs, that "John (her husband) was in treaty for a large house in Belerma Square, which they intended fitting up as an extensive boarding-house,—belonging to the widow of the late Mr. John Merapie, Mrs. Ivraine's uncle, you know, father; and who do you think she turns out to be? Margaret Maxwell, old Nancy Maxwell's granddaughter!"

Beyond this passage Colin never got; he read it over and over and over, as if to persuade himself it was a reality and no mistake; he seemed unable to credit the evidence of his clear blue eyes; he sat with his elbows resting on the cottage table, as "Jessie" said, "glowering at the paper as if there were glamour in it."

"It is very like glamour at ony rate, lassie," he explained; "but I trust it is na that a' thegither; if it's a truth, it's a good truth,—God send it may be one;" and so he folded up the paper, and, taking down the Bible, selected for the evening's reading the sixty-eighth Psalm, chanting it forth in a sort of exultant voice, and laying so marked an emphasis on the fifth and sixth verses as clearly demonstrated he had found for them that night some peculiar special application.

And so he had, true, honest, faithful-hearted

man; and for that he thanked the Giver of all Good, in tremulous accents, after he had closed the Holy Book, and went down on his knees to bless his Creator for all the mercies of that day; and the last words the old Highlander devoutly murmured that night ere he went thankfully to sleep, were those contained in one of the verses mentioned above,

"A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in His holy habitation."

CHAPTER X.

URGENT PRIVATE AFFAIRS.

It was on the morning following the arrival of his daughter's missive that Colin Saunders—both his hands resting on the handle of his spade—addressed the following brief sentence to his employer,

"I 'd be much obliged to you, sir, if you would look out for anybody you think would answer you in my place."

"In your place, Colin!" repeated Sir Ernest; "why, where are you going?"

"Na very far, sir," was the cautious rejoinder; but still just so far that I canna stay here any longer."

"What is the matter?" demanded his master; "is the work too hard, or is your health bad, or do you want assistance, or require more wages? what is it?"

"The work is neither light nor heavy, sir," was the satisfactory reply; "and my health is just what it always was since the time I was a bairn,—for I never had ache, nor pain of body, in my life; and, for assistance, so long as I can hold a rake I always said, 'No pert English puppy' should ever set foot in a garden I had any say to; and in regard of wages, if I wanted an advance I'd ask ye for them: but what ye give me keeps me comfortable, and more. No, no, it's not that; but if you could get any one to suit you and the place, I'd be moving."

"If you would explain the reason of this sudden determination," said Sir Ernest, who somehow felt that, when Colin departed, all that remained to him of his wife,—the living link which connected, after a fashion, all her past, and even her present, being with his—would be removed from his sight for ever; "if you would explain the reason of this sudden determination, perhaps it might be overcome. Has any one offended you, or do you dislike the country and wish to revisit Scotland? We have got on very well together for five years past, and——"

"It's owre long a time for any one man to serve any one master, I know," responded Colin; "but, in consideration of your being a bit beyond most

masters, and as I am no ill to put up with myself, I would have overlooked that and worked at a while longer; I have nothing particular to say against you or your country, sir,—you're far more of a gentleman than I ever thought to see on this side of the Tweed, and you have treated me like one; and, though you have no mountains, or lochs, or hills, or headlands, nor nothing here but fields and swamps, and a lot of trees, still the soil does well enough for flowers, and it agrees well enough with me; and, though I do not think much of the people of my own walk of life here, seeing that they just has one thought and one hope in existence,—which hope is that they may get their dinners, and which thought is how; still I can bear well enough with them, even whilst I can't help compassionating their ignorance in regard to the 'food that perisheth not:' and none of your servants has offended me, sir; for, when I have let them go on mocking and jeering at my speech (which is better English, I know, than theirs) for five long years, and never answered them, it's not likely they could 'set' me at the place now. No; I may have, like most other folks, something to complain of—at every end and in the middle besides—but there is still a deal to be thankful for,

too; and I would not be talking of leaving ye yet, only I have business of my own, and of two or three others, that must be attended to before I'm many days older. It just so happens that it suits me to leave Lorton and go for awhile away out of Paradise; and, if my dear old master were now alive and standing where you now are, and I still myself, and him to say, 'Stay, Colin, I want ye to bide a wee bit longer,' I would n't do it, sir! I could n't do it!" and the old man dashed his spade emphatically into the ground as he concluded his speech.

"If you would not remain at his bidding, Colin," replied Sir Ernest, "I need scarcely expect you to do so at mine; but is there nothing I can do for you? do you want another place, or wish to return to Scotland? Tell me how I can help you, and I will."

"I neither want, at this present time, sir, silver nor gold, nor anything but freedom to do that which I am humbly grateful to God my hand has found to do. I thank you, Sir Ernest Ivraine, for the great kindness and friendship you have shown to a poor gardener like me; and if I desired to see the heather again, or had the least notion of another place, I would tell you so; but

I am not going to the Highlands nor to look for a new master, for there 's not a man in England I had rather serve than yourself, and only one in Scotland, and him only because of his grandfather and cousin. There are just two things I would make free to ask, and, if ye would grant them, I 'd be for ever obliged to you."

"And what may they be?" demanded his master.

"First, that I may go whenever I like, without waiting for you to find some one to suit exactly,—maybe sometime I would come back and put things to rights myself again, if you just had any common body at the present to keep them from going very far wrong; and second, that you would give me leave to take that briar bush wi' me; it 's a valueless thing, and does not look well amongst the flaunting southern roses."

Ernest's eye fell on the plant the gardener indicated, and a sort of tremor shook his voice as he answered,

"You can go when you like and come back when you like; but as for the briar, take anything you choose out of the garden excepting that: my—my—sister-in-law is fond of it, and I think it is the only one about the place."

"If the lady has a regard for it, why in course a twig of it must not be touched," answered Saunders, a smile flickering over his hard face; "I would not have mentioned it, only I thought it was a sort of stranger here, far away from its own country, and that nobody would look after it when I was gone; but it is all right now, sir, thank you."

And, as the new baronet turned slowly away, the old man muttered,

"And so that angel-faced woman is fond of it? Aye, maybe so; but there's another about the house fonder of it than any of us; not for her sake, but for *her's*. Oh! Miss Mina, if I could only but see ye once again, ye poor, heedless, unfortunate, heart-broken young creature!"

Colin's rapid conclusion was quite correct; there was no flower in the garden Mina had loved like that Scotch briar: from the time the bush came into bloom till its last leaves strewed the ground, she had been wont to gather its blossoms and wreathe them in her hair and wear them in her girdle. She always kept a bouquet of those perishable roses on her dressing-table: that briar was her quiet home friend; its perfume came over her soul like the memory of the tones and the looks

of those who dwelt on earth no longer; and now, when Mina was there no more to pluck its flowers, the bush acquired a sort of interest in her husband's eyes,—an interest, not even the most beautiful of Flora's darling children had ever previously inspired in him.

"That came from the land o' the leal, Ernest," remarked his sister-in-law one day as they passed by the spot where it grew.

"I believe so," he briefly replied.

The lady paused to gather one of the roses; and, after thoughtfully gazing at it for a moment, she said, placing the wild bud tenderly in the black riband belt which encircled her waist,

"She was fond of it, Ernest, was she not,—very fond?"

"She loved everything that came from Scotland, and every person who could say he wa born there."

"Natural enough," answered his sister; "she loved her own land well, Ernest, but she loved you better, though more silently. Never shake your head with such an incredulous air: I know as well that she did, that she does, love you, as I knew, when I first caught sight of that briar bush, that many a time she stopped beside it, as

I did but now, to pull its blossoms or inhale its fragrance, whilst a thought of silent moors and stern mountains and dark lakes swept through her mind. Her young heart was almost broken here, Ernest; it was no place to bring a wife to: I plead her cause, as one woman may plead that of another, and ask you, candidly and fairly, was it?"

"No," he confessed: "I did very wrong; I ought never to have married her."

"Not to break her spirit here, at all events," returned the lady. "When Henry told me what a dreary home yours was, I mourned for the girl whom you had wedded to misery, as I might for a friend, for a sister. He said, when he heard of your marriage, that, for centuries past, no woman had been otherwise than wretched whose evil destiny brought her to reside in Paradise; some, he said, dragged out life under circumstances, when the prolongation of the gift was a cruel misfortune; but most crept, broken-hearted, to the old family vault and sank thankfully to sleep in that dreary abiding-place. Therefore I sorrowed for her; and, since I have seen your home and some of your relatives, and heard more of Mina, I have sorrowed with a deeper grief:

I thank heaven, however, that, in her rash flight from your father's gloomy abode, she passed by the churchyard without pausing: we could make Paradise brighter to her now. And, in reference to that flight, which you so sternly resent, let me say something also, Ernest. What she married you for, I am not competent to tell,—it may have been for affection, it may have been chiefly from prudential motives; her decision may have been swayed by the advice of friends, by reason, by gratitude, by feelings of her desolate position, by the prospect of a happy home: hundreds of circumstances and changes and thoughts and ideas may have influenced her original choice; and of these of course I can say nothing: but I do know what she left you for, and it was because of the love she bore you."

"Women are all alike," said Ernest impatiently, as his sister concluded, "in their loves and their friendships and their aversions they are influenced solely by imagination; they talk about things of which they are wholly ignorant, and, commencing upon false premises, bring out at length what they consider satisfactory results, but which are, after all, completely erroneous."

"You are very ungallant," said Mrs. Ivraine,

with a faint smile; "but prove your words, it is all I ask at present."

"Why, here are you, whom my brother and I both deemed a model of sense, speaking absolutely with tears in your eyes of a person you never saw, and coming to conclusions regarding her conduct, when, in reality, you know nothing of the facts of the case."

"Then why do you not put me in possession of them, Ernest?" she inquired.

"Because the subject is a painful one," he said in a low harsh voice; "I wish to forget it—and her."

"But cannot," continued his sister-in-law. "Ah! believe me, we women arrive occasionally at juster conclusions than you; and, if she had not been worth remembering, if she had not been worth thinking about, I know—wife though she is—you would neither have remembered nor thought of her so long."

And what the gentle lady took on trust, Colin Saunders had long known from actual observation; and, firmly convinced of the fact that, wherever Mina was, she ought to come back to a home where a tender welcome awaited her, the old Scotchman—having set his household duly

in order—went forth, for the second time, to view, with holy horror, "Sawtan's den," as he termed England's metropolis, though he was not without a faint idea that there might be some good people dwelling even in the city so especially favoured, as a modern divine has asserted, by being made by the evil one his "abiding place," or seat of government, when not more agreeably and profitably located in Paris.

It was one summer Saturday night that Colin found himself "turning matters" over with his daughter; and, after he had turned them — as the Scotch minister did Ephraim—into every possible shape, he proposed to his son-in-law to "read and expound a chapter and make an extempore prayer," to which proposition Frith agreed with an expression of face decidedly more mournful than solemn; for Frith was a hopeless sinner, who had attended "kirk" and passed sacramental examinations, and listened devoutly to Colin's exhortations in the days when he was looking admiringly on Jennie Saunders, but who had since wofully disappointed his worthy father-in-law, by walking back along the path leading to Church and State, whistling organs, unelected preachers, book services, new style psalms, and a hundred other

innovations and abominations, too hideous to enumerate.

"I hope ye 'll be saved, John," said Colin, doubtingly, to his relative on one occasion; "but I 'm greatly afraid of it."

"I hope we both shall, and many another," was the reply; "why are you so especially uneasy about me?"

"Because, instead of humbly eating the true bread as ye used to do, ye go now and sit under a man who reads his prayers and writes his sermons."

"That puts me out of his power," was John's sinful retort; "I know exactly what I 'm in for, and I am not at the mercy of a mortal to keep me for hours and hours, hearing things repeated half a dozen times, as you are."

"The Lord is good; but there 's little hope for you, I 'm afraid," exclaimed Colin; "it 's a part of my creed, that any man who cannot make a prayer of himself, ought never to be let read one for others; he 's not fit to stand up and expound. And what 's a written sermon but a device o' the enemy? a speaking from the head, not from the heart; not of spiritual understanding, but of carnal knowledge."

"But half the sermons in Scotland are written; and I am sure it is better for a clergyman to read it at once than to spend nights and days, as I heard of one doing, stamping in desperation across the floor, trying to learn his task off, so that when Sunday drew near, nobody in the house could get any sleep for his shouting and thumping."

"It's a bad way, John, to try to make your own character whiter, by flinging soot on your neighbours, and it's unbecoming a man o' discretion to repeat a wheen of disreputable truthless stories. I don't want to say anything hurtful to you, either about your country or yourself, but I have great fears concerning your soul; and; as for England, considering what sort of teaching it has, I just wonder it's as good as it is;" and, by way of giving John Frith's spiritual interests "a lift," and also to the end that right might, for once, be done in "the modern and sinful Babylon," Colin Saunders—being that Saturday night in a peculiarly argumentative and theological mood—treated the family to such an endless disquisition on matters of faith and doctrine, and points of difference and points of union on soul-destroying heresies and more venial transgressions, that his namesake, Colin the younger, had to be carried

sleeping to bed, and his sister got so tired and cross, that, for very peace sake, her mother bore her off in like manner to a similar destination.

And poor Colin added, on the strength of this juvenile backsliding, such a number of extra clauses to his earnest petition, that John Frith told his wife, in confidence, he was glad her father did not visit them often, for that he could not profess to "stand" such endless preaching. Jennie remembered the time when she had to do so for years; and, as she thought of the faithful kindness of her father's heart, and of his sterling goodness,—of the quiet tranquillity of those former days, and the frequent thoughts of the "better land," which constant talking on religious subjects awakened; she wondered—with a wonder born partly of fervent love for her fatherland, and partly of a reverence for the old grey-haired man—whether his way were not, after all, the best,—whether he had not brought up her brothers and sisters more in the way they should go than she was training her children,—whether it were not better to speak always of heaven than always of earth,—whether it might not be more holy and good to consider this world as a mere trying preparation for another, than to

educate for success and happiness in it, and almost it alone.

And that expounding of the Scriptures, and long weary, though fervent, extempore prayer, brought such memories of old back to her mind,—such thoughts of mother and home, and brothers and sisters, all dead and gone, that the woman—happy wife and parent though she was—dropped some sorrowful tears that night on her pillow, and resolved that she and the old true-hearted man—her father, her visitor—would go to some Calvinistic place of worship on the morrow, where he might hear what she knew he had long been debarred from,—a sermon of high-seasoned doctrine, delivered from the lips of a Presbyterian minister; for Colin had for years been doomed to subsist on such rare morsels of heavenly food as dropped from the lips of Baptists, Independents, Methodists, and even Church and State people. He said "It was a bad place where a sinner could hear naething to profit him;" and accordingly, when other sources of drinking from the fountain of living waters failed, he repaired to church, though the forms and manner, and frequently matter, made him sometimes consider the draught none of the purest or clearest; but now he looked forward

to a treat,—to hearing a discourse from a real genuine disciple and follower of "John Knox," to quoting of texts and finding of proofs, to a wrestling with the enemy, to a dividing into heads, and an expounding and lengthening and branching and explaining, which might last for hours if only "handled" properly.

So Colin fell asleep, and never wakened till the two "Government" calls of "milk" and "mack'rel" startled him from blissful slumber; the old man rubbed his eyes, considered him what day it might be, came to the conclusion it was indeed "the Sabbath;" and, muttering "Lord forgie the sinful wretches," started from his couch, dressed, and went down stairs vexed in spirit, astounded in mind.

The crowds of people he and Jennie encountered as they wended their way to "kirk," who were all going likewise to worship God after the manner of their fathers, though very possibly not of Colin's fathers, appeased him not in the slightest degree; and when—after the first four verses of the twenty-fifth Psalm had been read, without the rather nasal twang which was of sweet savour in the nostrils of the descendant of the Covenanters, the organ pealed forth—Saunders groaned almost aloud, and

looked so utterly disgusted that his neighbour, a plump, short, good-natured English shopkeeper, asked if he were ill.

"No in body," was the whispered rejoinder, which caused his fellow-worshipper to look curiously at him, marvelling if he had committed any heinous sin, the recollection of which was weighing on his conscience.

And the prayer: "I could hae made a better mysel," thought Colin; "not a bit o' power, or force o' glory in it." Then the sermon: "Just twenty-nine minutes lang, Jennie," he said to his daughter on his way home; "no controversy in any divide o't, just read like a church one, any man could have done the same, every bit as cleverly;" and so the old man groaned and lamented, asserting his heart was "sair" for his child and troubled for her offspring; and, on the strength of his disappointment and his anxiety, after dinner he laid forcible hands on two of his grandsons, and made them read the sixth chapter of First Chronicles, turn and turn about from beginning to end, insisting that they should spell the words if unable to pronounce them, which lengthened the "teaching" to such a period, and impressed every letter so forcibly on the chil-

dren's recollection that, till the hour of their deaths, they never forgot the Sunday when they read a chapter filled with hard names, and eighty-one verses long, through, for their Scotch grandfather. But at length the "day of rest" came to a conclusion,—that day on which Colin could not have worked if he would, and would not even if he could; and the night closed over a city which never seems to sleep; and then the sun rose clear and bright on the second morning of the week, and called the descendant of those who worshipped on the bare hill sides back to earthly cares and thoughts and wishes; and, as he never undertook any enterprise for the success of which he would have felt it a sin and a mockery to pray, he went forth full of faith, strong of purpose, honest of heart, into the turmoil and noise and bustle, which are the distinguishing characteristics of England's metropolis.

CHAPTER XI.

A CONSULTATION.

Mr. William Twining's office was situated in one of those quiet old London streets, where that peace and independence of thought and action, and leisure, moreover,—for thought and action unobtainable at any money in what half-crazed sentimental folks delight to call the "tranquil" country, may be procured for a not extravagant rental; and there he reflected on cases, and received such clients as Heaven sent him, in a thankful spirit, and pondered over their stories with a just one.

He was, in brief, that which it is the universal fashion to call a rarity,—to wit, an honest attorney,—who, if he did occasionally make out tolerably long bills, worked for and earned their amounts fairly—a thing frequently not the case with other callings in far better odour than law.

No one ever hears a quack doctor cried down.

Did you, dear reader, ever happen to be present when a high-minded solicitor—there are such in the world—was praised up? Mr. Twining, at all events, was a kind, quaint, dry, conscientious man of law and business. His father, a rigid Presbyterian of the strictest Calvinistic principles, had gravely shaken his head when he heard William wished to become what he had always considered a sort of relation of the Evil One.

"Not an attorney!" he exclaimed; "no honest man *can* be that!" but William replied,

"I will be an attorney, father, if you please; I am honest, and, with God's blessing, I mean to remain so: the profession is no worse than many—a vast deal better than some;" and thus he started in life, true of heart, firm in principle: and wealth sufficient, and a respected name, came to be his ere long; and, before old Mr. Twining died, he was often heard humbly thanking Providence that, let who else disgrace his calling, his son William was, in word and thought and deed, an honourable man—an upright, honest lawyer.

At whose door Colin Saunders, on the Monday afternoon following his arrival in town, tapped in a manner peculiar to himself, with two of the finger joints of his right hand, producing from those simple

substitutes for a knocker a sound precisely similar to the cracking of nuts; which sound attracting, as was intended, the attention of the solicitor, that gentleman exclaimed, without, however, raising his eyes from a parchment deed he was perusing, glorious with old English letters, and plentifully interspersed with Latin words, "Come in!" whereupon Colin did come in, and, cautiously closing the door behind him, stood, hat in hand, surveying the attorney from head to foot, waiting till that individual should address him.

"Well," said Mr. Twining at length, "what can I do for you?"

"Maybe much, maybe little," answered Colin, making a sort of bow to the questioner, not out of respect for his position or his profession, but because of a kind of preference he had conceived for him; "folks ca' ye Mr. William Twining, don't they?"

"All that know me do at any rate," returned the solicitor, looking in his turn intently at the hard honest Scotch face, and the curiously-cut clothes, and the long grey hair of Mina's faithful, humble friend.

"Are you busy the noo, sir," inquired that personage.

"Not particularly,—why?"

"Because if you were I'd mak' free to wait till ye were n't, that's all," said Saunders; "I want your entire understandings, sir,—not your ears only, but your whole head; and if you have to read anything over, sir, I——"

"No, no," interrupted Mr. Twining, pushing away the parchment; "No, no, I can attend to you entirely, and I will, so pray proceed: you will be able to talk better sitting; there is a chair."

"I 'm not much of a talker, sir," premised Saunders, taking possession of the seat, however; "holding with St. James that in the tongue lieth a world of iniquity; it's a wonderful thing, sir, that it lasts longer than our legs, and yet is used twice as much, seeing that they are sometimes still, and it never is. I am not much of a talker in a general way, but when I once do begin I can hold out just as long standing as sitting; but as you are so good, I will take it easy;" and, suiting the action to the word, he put his hat carefully underneath the chair, crossed both hands on the top of the stick he carried, rested his chin thereon after his favourite fashion, and peered curiously at the solicitor,—who, sitting behind his desk, calmly

surveyed his new client, whose mood and manner somehow suited him better than a more servile one could possibly have done.

"Do you know what brought me here?" said Colin, at length.

"Your business, I presume," answered the attorney.

"*That* brought me to London, but might have taken me into any other office in it," retorted Saunders.

"True," replied Mr. Twining; "some one told you to come here, perhaps."

"No one," was the response.

"Well then, fate sent you," said the solicitor.

"Fate and myself," answered Colin, approvingly, "and I think, from what I have put thegither, that ye will 'do' my work the way I want it done. You see, when first I set out, I said to myself, 'Now I know nobody here and nobody knows me; I can pay well, but I must be treated well;" and I thought and I thought how 'twas best to walk and where to walk to, and I determined to go to no second-rate place, but just to the best, and I asked my son-in-law where the ablest attorneys lived, and he told me; and so I went into one grand office, and there were three

young gentlemen, and, whenever they set eyes on me, they began to sneer and laugh.

"'Could I see Mr. Pickstock?' I asks.

"'What do you want with him, my friend?' says the biggest and boldest.

"'That's my business,' I answers.

"'It's mine, if I choose to make it so,' he says, getting angry.

"'Two folks have to say words to that,' I says, walking out and thinking, 'If those are the clerks, the master won't do for me.'

"I paced on and on—for, oh! sir, the streets here are an awful length, and places are a dreadful piece asunder—till I came to another office; goes in there: only one sharp looking chiel behind the desk.

"'I want to speak a few words with Mr. Cragnell, if you please, sir.'

"'What's your business?' was the first word.

"'Oh!' says I, 'that's asking, but not telling;' and leaves him, too. The next was little better; said Mr. Blackader was busy, and that he would do just as well.

"'Maybe so,' I says, 'since neither of ye will suit me;' and so I went to well nigh a dozen, till I lighted on you.

"'Could I see Mr. Twining, sir?" I asked of that civil-spoken young gentleman below; and, without a grin, or crooked word, or look, he said,

"'Walk up stairs; first door to the left.'

"'All right,' thinks I, and here I am, sir."

"Thanks to my son," said Mr. Twining quietly.

"Son or clerk, it didn't matter to me," said Colin authoritatively; "it showed me the kind of place and person I was coming to spend my money in and on; and now, sir, having just told you that to start with, I will go on with my story: shall I tell you the whole of it, sir?"

The attorney hastily reflected what matters he had in hand, and, finding the result in favour of half-an-hour's broad Scotch, he answered,

"If necessary, yes."

"Well, it's necessary in one way and not in another," said his client; "it's not just needful for the 'law;' but still, if I began at the beginning, and told all right through, I could get on better, sir."

"In that case, you had best make a sure commencement, that you may not have to go back again," said Mr. Twining; and Saunders, after a benign "That's just what I think," pushed a stray

lock of grey hair back from his face and proceeded thus:

"I needn't tell you, sir, that I'm Scotch, for if I were inclined to deny my country, my tongue wouldn't let me. I was born in the Highlands, and worked, from the time I was but a bit of a callant, about the garden of a gentleman who only had two faults in the world that ever I heard of,—a large family and but little to keep them with.

"Well, he died, and the daughters married, and some of the sons went abroad and died too; and his brother, the head of the clan (and a proud old clan they were come from), took one lad, the youngest of all, home, and, because I had been so fond of my dead master and so long about him when the old place was broken up and the family scattered, the laird took me also.

"I served him faithfully, both for love and from duty; and he educated his nephew and put him forward, as if he had been his own son; and, because the lad's head was full of nonsense and his heart of courage, he let him enter the army and go away from us all, who were proud and fond of him; far away from the blue Highland mountains and the beautiful lakes and the heather

and the moors and the place where he and his were respected and known; away from all, to push his fortune. I think I see him now," added the old man drawing the back of his hand over his eyes, "dressed, for the first time, in uniform, looking so brave and young and handsome, that morning when he came out to bid me good bye: I believe, sir, I was fonder of him than I ever was of any one else in the world almost; and I had reason for it, for he was the finest and the best gentleman ever wore a Highland bonnet: his clan were, every man of them, kind and good and true; and, because I had known him from a child, I felt proud of him, and thought he was the kindest and the truest of all. But, sir, as I was saying, he went; and years and years passed away and we never heard much about him, till it turned out he was going to be married to an English lady, not half so well born as himself, but twice as rich. God, in whose sight we are all equal, forbid that I would speak against any one for not having the real ancient blood in their veins; and I doubt not the gentlewoman's father was a very worthy man in his way, and there was no question but that money would have been very useful to a gentleman who, besides himself

and his sword, had no fortune but a very small one. Still we all did think, every one of us who had an interest in the honour of the clan, that Master Allan might have looked higher, and that we would all have rather have welcomed home a Scotch bride, even if she had little gold to her tocher; however, he was not going to marry to please us, but himself, and so he did marry the lady, as it turned out afterwards, without her father's consent, who, at first, would give her no money or blessing, or countenance or anything: and what a sore heart it gave all of us at home to hear our dear young gentleman had been looked coldly on by a London trader; we wondered Master Allan had not more pride than to put his birth in the scales against riches, more particularly in England, where gold always weighs heavier than blood; but love does a deal, Mr. Twining, wi' the young and the foolish.

"Her father's displeasure did not last for long; how could it? and, after he had cooled a bit, he allowed them a handsome income, and everybody said, when he died, Mr. Allan would be as rich as a prince; but things did not turn out so, for at his death, there was scarcely enough left to pay his debts, and our young gentleman did not

get a single penny: that happened about three years after the wedding.

"But, mercifully, he did not then need money, for a rich relation of his made a will, giving the young officer a beautiful estate near Loch Lomond, and five hundred a year and some other things besides; and then he came home, with his wife, to Scotland, and retired from the army, and lived sometimes in Edinburgh, oftener near the Loch; and, because his heart never changed or cooled, he did not forget me, but said, on account of my having served his father, if I would like to serve him, I might make my home under the shadow of his roof-tree, for that, so long as he had a place, I should work about it, and that, so long as he had a sixpence, I should never want: ah! there were few on the earth like him. Am I tiring you, sir?"

"No," answered Mr. Twining, "not at all;" and he spoke the truth. The old man's somewhat prosy tale did not weary him, for the evidence every word bore of steady sterling attachment; the strength of affection and kindness, which had joined the master and the servant; the breadth of consideration and love, which had power to span the great gap lying betwixt the high and

the low, the gentleman and the labourer, and to knit these two—the representatives of each class —so strongly together, impressed the attorney wonderfully; and, besides, Colin rather interested him. He wondered whither all this was tending, and so he had temper and patience and kindness to listen attentively to each sentence, as Saunders proceeded.

"I should tell you, sir, that, long before I left the old laird's place, I married a quiet careful young woman from the nearest town; and, in going backwards and forwards to see her, I came to know a family, concerning one of whom I have a good deal to say after a bit. Their name was Beaver; they were not real Scotch people, I think, but that has nothing to say to my story: they had lived neighbours to my mother-in-law for some time, and there was a sort of friendship among them all, so I got to know them.

"There were an old grandmother, two or three daughters, and a son's widow, with no end of children, all living under one roof, when I first married; but, in course of time, they scattered, and one Margaret, the prettiest and boldest of all, who had such a temper nobody could agree with her, went off to a cousin at Paisley, and

became apprenticed to the millinery trade and got on well, at least, so her grandmother told us; and the summit of their pride came when the poor girl married an uppish young clerk, a mere lad, who was in a small branch bank in Paisley, an Englishman, and, as some said, a gentleman.

"If he had been a hangman I should almost have pitied him, for she had a tongue such as no sensible fellow cares to have always at his ear, and a temper it was ill to thole, and a spirit for grandeur and finery it was hard to satisfy; but they were as proud of the match as could be, and Margaret made him get leave of absence, and went to show him to her friends in the Highlands; and when she found my wife and I and the children had flitted to Loch Lomond, she brought him round to see us and the place, and asked us to go and see them at Paisley. They were just married then, and she was so proud of him that pride of station had no time to grow for a while: and, though she did give herself some airs, still she had not come to be above staying with a poor gardener like me; and, as for the bridegroom, he was just, to all appearance, a slip of a love-sick, good-natured, conceited lad: but I saw there was the making of a real bad one in him; my wife said I was 'set'

against Mr. Maxwell because he was English,—but it was not that. I like an honest man, let him be born on what side of the Tweed he will, and I cannot thole a double word, no matter in how broad Scotch it is spoken; there was cunning about him,—the making of a real bad one, as I remarked before, and so it turned out. I went once to see a relative of my own at Paisley, and when there I met young Maxwell and his wife walking: she was as fine as any real born lady, and he as proud as the best earl in the land; they kept up a great appearance, but people said they did not live happily together, and wondered where they got the money. The next thing I heard was that he had run off over head and ears in debt, having been suspected of stealing from the bank for a long time, and that there were warrants out for his apprehension. He was never caught, however; for months afterwards word came from Yorkshire that a man had been found dead in a ditch by the wayside, and, from letters and papers in his possession, there could be no doubt of his being Maxwell: the bank sent people to the place and sifted the matter, and it all turned out just as had been said; and Margaret, his widow, having quitted Paisley and gone south, nobody knew or cared

where, the whole thing was forgotten. I never heard a word about either of them until a day or two since, from that time to this; but please you, sir, to keep them in mind for all that."

The lawyer, whose attention had seemed to Colin to be somewhat flagging, smiled at this caution, and resigned himself to a patient hearing of the whole case. He could not conceive to what possible end all this was tending; he had endeavoured to discover the connection between a dead clerk and a Highland gentleman, but in vain, so he waited for further explanation, twisting a pencil in the interim between his fingers to beguile the progress of the narrative: he wondered when the old man would get it finished; but no way appalled at *his* share of the task, Colin resumed.

"My young master, as I have told you, came back to Scotland with his wife and one child, a son; I don't think there was a deal of love in his heart for the English lady, though they got on well enough; and, indeed, there was little in her to love,—a useless, handless, headless, foolish woman, who cared for nothing but driving about from morning till night, or lying on the sofa, or receiving company; she sat up half the night and slept half the day; there was no harm in her,

and there was no good; she was no one for Captain Allan to fall in love with and marry, only he did both, and then he came not to love her a great deal, but just poured out his whole heart, after a manner, on a girl who was born under the shadow of Ben Lomond; he was far too fond of her, far, if such a thing be possible, he idolized that child, Miss Mina——"

The old man paused, and once again Mr. Twining's interest became aroused, for he noted how the speaker's voice quivered as he uttered the last few words. Well it might, when he thought of that period in her life and of the last time he had beheld her, of the love which was felt for her then, of the hate cherished against her since, of her childhood and her womanhood,—well it might.

"I don't want to say what I thought of and felt for her, for it makes a child o' me," said Colin, mastering his emotion; "but I saw her grow up under my eyes; I loved the sight of her coming across the gardens with her long hair flying behind her in the breeze; she was my master's darling,—always with him, always at his side; wherever he went she went, and he spoiled her, and made her as wayward and as hard to

turn from her own road as child ever was, and if she could have been altogether spoiled she would; but there was always good in her, and she had a shy, quiet nature, and a loving, guileless heart; and you might have known—though her home was such a happy one, and her father so proud and fond of her—by the strange thoughtful sayings she had, and a mournful, deep look in her eyes, that she was born for trouble of some sort: she has had enough, one time and another, at any rate, to make her look sorrowful now.

"She was still but a small fairy bit of a thing when death and ruin came to that beautiful place, —the captain died; and then it turned out that anxiety killed him, for he had speculated and lost, and the creditors got all, to the very furniture; and the widow and the two children and myself went back to the Highlands to the old laird's place. His wife and all his family were dead, and, as he was living alone there with just one grandson, you might have thought the lady would like to stay there always; but she had a rich half-brother in London here, and so, when Miss Mina got better of a fever we all expected she'd have died of, they set off for England, and for years and years I never set eyes on the child of my dear master again.

"But the laird got letters, saying first how Mr. Malcolm (the son) had entered the navy, and then how he had left it; and when he was quite a young gentleman he and his sister came to the Highlands on a visit to their uncle. Except that she was taller I did not think her a bit altered, and neither she was; and I hoped she would have stayed there altogether, for the laird's grandson was a fine gentleman, and good and clever,—but, somehow, they did not make it up; and so, when a month or two had gone by, they left us all again; and that autumn my young master married a great heiress,—a very handsome young lady, daughter to a General, with no end of grand friends and great connexions; it was a very good match for him,—so everybody said. Maybe so; I did not think it.

"It was not very long after that till news came to the Highlands of the death of the rich uncle I spoke of in London. Even his sister, it appeared, had always thought he was a bachelor, and so expected he would leave all to the two children; therefore you may guess the blow it was when a wife and son started up to claim everything: there was no will, the marriage could not be disputed, though it appeared they had lived on bad terms

for years, and that he had only kept her from coming forward publicly by giving her large sums of money, and threatening to disinherit the boy if she made any stir. The widow of my old master and his two children were turned out of the house they had looked on as their own,—out into the world, with just one thousand pounds between them and the workhouse.

"You know, sir, how long a thousand pounds will last when used by a spendthrift lad and an extravagant, heedless woman: they made great speed through that, the only fortune my dear old master had been able to leave to his wife; and her health, which had long been failing, getting worse as the money got lower, they all started off once again for the Highlands, to the house of the chief of their clan,—the one relative they had in the world whose door was not shut upon them.

"I was not there when they arrived, for the new lady and I never 'sorted' well together; and, besides, I had a daughter married in London, and my wife was dead, and the rest of my children, all but the youngest, and so, when Mr. Malcolm got me a place with a friend of his in Lincolnshire, I packed up and left the Highlands, and came to England; but I heard first one thing

and then another about them that made my heart ache. The mother went quietly to her grave, and, after a bit, Miss Mina and her brother left the Highlands — which news never surprised me at all—and came to a friend in London; and the finish of all was, the laird's death after that. For a year there was a sort of dead calm in their affairs; but they were drifting, drifting on the breakers,—poverty and starvation. Suddenly, all at once, word was written to me, that the young lady was going to be married to the eldest son of the gentleman I served in Lincolnshire."

"Well," said Mr. Twining, as the old man paused.

"It was not well, sir," replied Colin; "it was ill, and I knew it: I knew what kind of a home the only one she could have for years would be; I knew the nature of the people she was coming among; I knew her temper, I knew her heart, I knew everything but the length and breadth and depth of the love the man she was proposing to marry bore her,—all; and so I travelled here, and I prayed and begged, and I warned and I counselled; but I might as well, or better, have stayed at home, for the more I said against her taking him for a husband, the more set she grew

to become his wife. I told her she had been a wayward child, and she answered she was wayward still; and so, sir, she married and came home to misery and sorrow and wretchedness untellable. You don't know what a place it was: I would very nearly as soon have seen her in her coffin as wandering about it, pale and careworn and ghost-like; but it was so fated,—home she came."

Saunders arose from his seat as he brought this sentence to a conclusion.

"Surely we have not got to a finish yet," thought Mr. Twining; and he was correct. Colin had only risen that he might get a little closer to the lawyer, who was becoming fairly wearied and mystified by the long and apparently unmeaning detail.

"I do not know," continued the Scotchman, "I never could yet get to know, what brought things to a climax; but one night, about three years after her marriage, she came to my cottage door in despair, and told me she was leaving the place for ever, and then she ran away, carrying her child with her. I followed my dear young lady, and tried all I could to get her to turn, but she would not; and she left husband, home,

and everything but her daughter behind, and went away all alone: nobody but myself guessed where, and she had bound me up not to tell, and I could not, after I had promised, break my word, could I, sir?

"Changes came about the place: an aunt died, and all her gold went to her brother, Miss Mina's husband's father; you understand, sir. He died, and, passing over his two sons, left every shilling he had in the world and every acre of ground, excepting a swampy, entailed, valueless place, to the eldest boy of the youngest, who had just come home from India, bringing a wife with him who could make sunshine in a prison and a heaven even upon earth: God bless her sweet face, I say, and, I am sure hundreds have said the same before me."

"And has the wife of the eldest, that Mina you speak of, never returned to her husband?" inquired Mr. Twining.

"Never, sir; and she ought, for his heart is bound up in her, and it would be a happier home now: she ought to seek him in his poverty, for he will never seek her; she ought, indeed."

"And is that what you require my assistance for?" demanded Mr. Twining, somewhat disap-

pointed at the full stop Colin thought fit to make at this point.

"No, sir," he responded, "though I'd be very glad if you could bring it to pass; that is not it. I told you to remember Margaret Maxwell."

"I have not forgotten her," said the solicitor.

"That's well," answered Colin, "for she is still living, and turns out to be the wife of that uncle I spoke about."

"Curious coincidence," remarked Mr. Twining; "but I do not see what that has to do with the business."

"Don't you, sir?" answered Colin; "very likely not, but I will show you: I'm not much of a lawyer, but still I think if Maxwell were proved to have been alive at the time of her marriage to the other, it would make that marriage just about equal to none at all, wouldn't it?"

"Certainly; but how can you prove that?" demanded Mr. Twining, becoming at once professionally interested in the affair: "I thought you spoke of Maxwell as dead."

"So I did," said Colin, "so I did; but, within the last four years, since the death of the second husband, I have seen the first one alive."

"You are positive as to that fact?"

"Certain."

"You could not be mistaken as to his identity?"

"I should know him among ten thousand, and, what was more, he knew me."

"Then you want me to get back her uncle's fortune for this Miss Mina, as you call her; that's the summing up of the whole affair."

Colin did not answer this query directly; but, producing a bottle from some unfathomable hiding-place in his garments, held it up before the solicitor's eyes, and demanded if he saw it."

It was a pint bottle; and Mr. Twining's sight was of the clearest, so he answered, "Yes."

"Do you know what's in it?" asked the Scotchman.

"No; how should I?" returned the attorney in some surprise.

"It's full of money," explained Saunders. "I gave one just like this to my eldest daughter on her wedding-day, and I have been storing up this one for my youngest; but if you will make my young lady a great heiress, if you will get her justice, and bring some sort of joy to her heart, you shall have every guinea that's in it, every one, and Jessie shall either do without a portion,

or else Miss Mina give her one. I do not want ye, even now, to listen to me for nothing; I know your time is your capital just as much as mine, though you are a gentleman while I'm but a poor Highlander;" and, before the attorney could interpose to prevent him, Saunders knocked the neck off the bottle and proceeded to pick out a portion of its contents.

"Keep your money, keep your money, my honest fellow," said Mr. Twining, pushing aside the proffered amount; "I would not take a sixpence from you, if you had talked for a day: it is not so often I hear a tale which raises my opinion of my fellow creatures, that I need ask payment for hearkening to one. I will undertake the cause with my whole soul, and try to sift it to the best of my ability; if I succeed, your 'young lady' can either pay me my costs or not, just as she pleases; if not, believe me I shall mourn almost as much as you at the failure of my endeavours; but take back your daughter's portion untouched. I hope the child of such a father may meet with some one worthy of her, and, instead of making her dowry any less, I had rather make it more."

"Well," said Saunders, after a perplexed pause,

"if ever I heard the like o' that; why, since I was but a bit of a callant, it was always dinned into my ears that no lawyer could refuse a fee."

This remark was delivered with such perfect *naïveté*, it was such a genuine expression of surprise, that Mr. Twining could not avoid laughing outright.

"Money is a very tempting thing," he replied, "very tempting, I admit; but still there are things even lawyers can admire more,—a sterling, honest, faithful heart like yours, my friend; and truth and disinterested attachment, in times of trouble and adversity. This young lady you speak of must surely be good, to have awakened such a feeling of devotion; yet still I do not think she ought to have left her husband; I cannot approve of that."

"She was wrong, I know," pleaded Colin, "because it is what no woman ought to do; she was wrong in the deed, but I know her so well, that I feel sure her heart was right all the while,—she did it for the best. And oh! sir, if ye had seen the home, ye 'd wonder she was able to stand it so long; and if ye 'd seen her, your soul would have sorrowed for her,—indeed it would, many and many a day."

"I daresay it might," said the lawyer; "but now to business: I want the names of all these people to enable me to proceed in the affair with any hope of success, and their places of residence, past and present;—first, your own."

"Colin Saunders, sir, who served the Frazer clan for well nigh fifty years; my first master was Mr. Malcolm Frazer of Duncairn; my second, his brother, the Laird of Craigmaver; my third, Captain Allan Frazer of Glenfiord, and then I went back to the old laird again. My late employer was Sir Ernest Claude Ivraine of Paradise, in Lincolnshire; and his son, the present Sir Ernest, is husband of Miss Mina, Captain Allan Frazer's only daughter."

"Oh! if she were daughter-in-law to the late baronet, I could forgive fifty flights," said Mr. Twining; "I have heard of him before."

"I 'm sure you never heard any good, at any rate," remarked Saunders; "and Margaret Maxwell is now called Mrs. Merapie, and her first husband is known as Mr. Alfred Westwood; his office, four years ago, was at Wapping, and his wife lives in Belerma Square."

The solicitor jotted all this down on a slip of paper; and, then putting on his hat, said to his

client, " Come again at the same hour to-morrow,— I shall want to see you then, most probably."

Having uttered which brief sentence he nodded to Colin, and forthwith proceeded, *con amore,* to investigate the business, and put matters in train for a satisfactory result.

CHAPTER XII.

RIGHT OR WRONG.

MEANWHILE Mina, on whose behalf all these exertions were being made, was dwelling quietly under the roof of her former governess, at whose door she had appeared one dreary winter's morning, pale, cold, heart-broken.

"Mina!" exclaimed Miss Caldera when she saw her enter the sitting-room; "what in the world brings you here?"

"To ask what I am sure you will give me,—a welcome and a home;" and she laid her face so sorrowfully and entreatingly against that of her friend, she gazed with such a trusting, confiding, sad expression into her countenance, that Miss Caldera refrained from asking a single question, but took her old pupil, and that pupil's child, home to her heart and her hearth; and, from that time forth, her house was Mina's house, and her

care and grief and pleasure and companion, Mina Ivraine, who had been Mina Frazer, the wayward little Scotch girl of other and happier days.

Of the interval succeeding her flight, as of all such intervals there is little to tell—it passed Mina scarcely knew how: but she occupied herself busily in translations, working at them not as she might in other times have worked, under the influence of absurd visions and fits of industry, beguiled by vain delusions, and swayed backwards and forwards by extravagant hopes and overwhelming disappointments, but in sober practical earnest, for she had ceased to be an idealist, she had given over theorizing and fancying herself a genius; she had ceased trying many things, having come to understand that success in any one walk of life comes only to the patient plodder, who has energy to determine and faith to wait and persevere; she saw she had made a mistake before in attempting original matter at all, and a much greater mistake in flying from language to language, instead of quietly perfecting herself in one: so she now devoted her time and talents (for though not a "genius," as Cecilia had been wont sneeringly to call her, she possessed a certain portion of ability) to one particular style of translating; and meeting,

in due course, with moderate success, she was enabled, as in former times she might have said, "to earn enough to keep herself and child off the parish."

But she did not say so now, for she had learned not to despise small profits: her wild spirit was tamed, subdued, crushed,—she hung on the stalk like a broken flower; but as some plants only give out their richest perfumes when dying, so the best part of her nature developed when she seemed drooping and fading. Miss Caldera thought more of her character then than she had ever previously done; she grew to understand and love her more, to see distinctly the good which had been taken on faith in days before; she had felt a strange love for the child, and a greater love for the girl, but the love she bore the young wife was stronger than all; it was not interest, and a kind of perpetual solicitude and anxiety in and for her welfare, that knit the two together now,—it was sympathy, respect, and esteem. It requires a great deal to make people care for one another in prosperity; there is no fire like that of adversity for bringing out the affections, for revealing the secret tracings of the soul, for interpreting the mysterious characters on the wall, for disclosing the hidden traits

of the mind,—none like it. You never obtain the full scent of the verbena leaf till a rough touch has bruised it; you never see the full virtue and sweetness of the human heart till sorrow has crushed it. Prosperity has few real friends—adversity none save true ones; and one of the latter Mina assuredly possessed: and gratefully the soul of the desolate and wandering wife turned to her who so cordially welcomed her home, and strove to make it comfortable and happy unto her.

"Do not pore over those books so, Mina dear," the governess was wont to say; "I have enough now for all of us, do not be too proud to share everything I possess in the world as if you were my daughter or my sister;" but Mina answered,

"Let me work, old friend,—it makes me feel a little independent, and keeps me from thinking."

Miss Caldera questioned greatly the accuracy of this latter statement; she noted how, day by day, Mina grew paler and thinner: there was no open malady to combat, nothing which could be taken hold of, nothing Mina ever complained of, nothing for which it seemed any good to consult a physician, —but still Miss Caldera did consult one.

"I only cure the body, my dear madam," he

answered; "it is impossible for me to do anything here."

For months Mina never alluded, directly or indirectly, to the subject of her griefs; but at last, one summer evening, in the gathering twilight—long after the news of the baronet's death had reached them, long after Mina had relinquished a vain hope which then stole into the mind, that perhaps her husband might seek her now that enemy was removed, when she felt her destiny for life was sealed, her fate in the world's great biography written, when she fancied her story was finished, her drama (all save the last act which must be gone through by all tragedians) performed—she sate down on a low stool at her friend's feet, and, beginning of her own accord, she told the whole tale through, repeating it quietly and calmly as a man might—when his hair was grey, and his steps tottering on the very brink of the grave, with passions quenched and heart chastened and sorrows soothed and hatreds overcome—speak in the evening of life of the fierce struggles and strong loves and violent hatreds and heavy disappointments which had clouded and brightened the morning of his existence. Time never takes the sting completely out of grief, but there are few

sorrows which, after the lapse of twenty years, seem as bitter as they did at first; and if fifty years, instead of only six brief months, had intervened since Mina's departure from Paradise, she could not have recounted the story of *that* night's proceedings with less show of violent emotion.

All seemed hushed, subdued, worn smooth by the action of the waves of time. Miss Caldera marvelled, but said nothing until her former charge, having, as it were, finished the book, closed the volume, ended the narrative, bent her head on her friend's hand and said,

"I don't suppose I shall live very long,—I feel so tired and weary; and when I am gone will you take care of my child? I should feel quite happy if you would only promise me that."

"Not yet, dear Mina, not yet," answered Miss Caldera, tenderly passing an arm around the slight figure of one whom sorrow had stricken so early; "not yet,—you must live to return to your husband, to bring up that child yourself, to be happy once more; never believe he did not love you, that he repented his marriage for his own sake, that he mourned for any one save you. Why did you leave him, Mina darling? why do you not go back to him now?"

The words fell on the wife's soul with a sort of shock: it was like opening the volume again and reading it afresh with a new light; it was like adding another act to a play, like being called upon to appear again on the boards of life's theatre after having bidden adieu to that unsatisfactory stage for ever. Mina started at the question, and, bursting into a flood of tears, answered,

"Oh! Miss Caldera, was not it his place to come to me? How could I remain to be a stumbling-block in his path,—to be an obstacle between him and his father's gold? how could I stay after he had told me he was sorry he had married me,—when, instead of being a blessing, it turned out I was a curse? Oh! no; if he had regretted my absence, he would have sought me ere this. Back again! no, no, I shall never see him more,—never! and I do not want to see him."

"Mina!" exclaimed Miss Caldera.

"It is true!" she replied; "I want to die and be troubled no more; seeing him would only be a fresh sorrow,—I have enough already to carry to the grave with me;" and she went sobbing out of the room, weeping as the governess had never seen her weep since the morning she came a fugi-

tive wife, to demand shelter and protection at the hands of a friend.

"It is well," said Miss Caldera, half-sadly, as she watched her go; "there is some hope still."

From that day a sort of change came over Mina: she grew more restless, she seemed less settled, less resigned, less tranquil; sometimes she took her child to her heart with a kind of wild, passionate love, different from her former calm tender affection, and again Miss Caldera found her once or twice weeping beside the infant's cradle.

"I had rather see her thus," soliloquized the governess, as on one of these occasions she retreated quietly from the apartment; "it is better:" and perhaps it was a more natural, though more painful, state of mind than the previous one.

"I will leave her to herself for a little while longer," she determined; "and if the desired result be not produced, I will give that explanation myself, now I know exactly the cause of separation; but I had rather let them manage it themselves, if possible; if not——"

We all know how fond ladies are of finishing off spoken sentences and mental reflections thus; and therefore, as Miss Caldera added not another syllable, you will please to understand, dear reader,

that the above "if not——" implied volumes of kind resolves the governess intended to develop into actions, if any necessity existed for her so to do. But she adopted the right plan in leaving Mina to follow the devices of her own heart; for there are some things it is much better for a stranger never to meddle prominently with, and any coolness between husband and wife is one of them; in family matters, no friend or acquaintance can interfere with advantage, safety, or profit; it is wisest to let kindred "fight it out," or "make it up," just as suits them best, at their own leisure, after their own fashion, and of their own accord; and, in reference to matrimonial quarrels, an old Scotchman's uncomplimentary remark, with regard to women, may be safely applied to them, which remark will serve at once to finish my sentence and to sum up its purport, "They are kittle cattle to hae ony say to."

So Miss Caldera thought; and she permitted Mina to pursue her own path through life without let or hindrance, and never intruded on her reflections, and never spoke a word of her husband, and thus a fortnight dragged by. Mina could not well tell how, only she knew she had suffered a great deal during its progress, bodily

and mentally: there was a kind of fever on her, which gave her a species of artificial strength; she had a ceaseless racking headache, and rapid movement seemed to be the only thing which drove it away for the shortest space, so Miss Caldera perpetually urged her to go out, and she did go out occasionally and walked till she was quite exhausted; then she came home and rested in a large arm chair, and thought and thought till she grew almost distracted. The governess noticed all this; but, like the prudent bridegroom in Young Lochinvar, said never a word. During the whole of her stay under her friend's roof, at this period, Mina was left as entirely as heart could desire "alone." No one meddled with, no one attempted to control or influence her, in the least; she was perfectly free to act as she chose, and yet still, and in spite of all, she was thoroughly wretched.

One day, as she was returning home from one of her short hurried rambles, an old woman crouching in a gateway, squalid in misery, a sort of animated skeleton, attracted her attention by a piteous appeal for charity. Like many another who gives to the "object" rather than to the "case," Mina, without considering whether she were bestowing

her alms judiciously or not, dropped a sixpence into the outstretched trembling hand; but, as she did so, to her extreme surprise, her fingers were clutched convulsively, and a voice, scarcely human in its tone, ejaculated "Mina Frazer!"

"I was Mina Frazer, once," she answered, in great bewilderment; "but who you are that know me so well, I cannot imagine; I do not remember you at all."

"Likely not," replied the woman; "the rich have short memories, just as short as the poor have long: you made some great match, I heard; did you not?"

Great match! Mina smiled bitterly as she replied,

"I married a gentleman called Ivraine."

"Yes, yes, Ivraine, I remember now; and you are very rich and happy?" She fastened her eyes interrogatively on the lady's face, and read the answer to her last query from that tell-tale index to the heart's most secret sorrows.

"Not very rich," Mina said.

"If you'll promise me gold, I will tell you something you would have given your life almost once to hear."

"About him! about my husband!" was the

exclamation which passed Mina's lips as she turned a shade paler than usual.

"Ah! that's the way of it, is it?" cried the wretched old creature, who had never relaxed her grasp of Mina's glove for an instant. "No, my pretty lady, it is not about your husband, but about one who once wanted to be your husband, Alfred Westwood. Ah! do you remember me now?"

"I do," said Mina, releasing herself by a great effort, and a look of pain and abhorrence flushed her face as she turned to go away; but the woman caught her dress when she attempted to do so, and held her tight while she continued,

"Nay, nay, you need not be so hot about a message I only delivered as it left my mistress's lips; you would do well to listen to me now: promise me gold, and I will tell you something worth hearing, something that will profit you and yours."

"I do not want to hear anything; I have no gold to give: let me pass," said Mina hurriedly.

"No gold, and yet a baronet's wife!" sneeringly remarked the hag; "that is strange, my Lady Ivraine."

"Not more strange than true," answered Mina,

trying to shake the skeleton fingers off her dress; and, succeeding at length in freeing herself by a sudden jerk from the beggar's grasp, she cut short what she considered mere painful, impertinent questioning, by a precipitate retreat.

Swiftly, however, though she walked, she was followed and tracked home, for the woman, addressing a bare-legged urchin who chanced at the moment to be passing, bade him "see where that lady went," adding, as an inducement for compliance, the promise, "if you bring me true word, I will give you a penny;" after which effort of generosity, she subsided into a fit of coughing, from which she was only roused by a policeman ordering her to "be off out of that," an admonition she slowly obeyed, hobbling away, apparently, with great pain and difficulty.

It is to be presumed the lad she deputed to watch Mina to her abode, faithfully discharged the duty entrusted to him, and also that he received the promised reward, for a few days afterwards he came to Miss Caldera's abode, with a message from his employer, setting forth that,

"Mrs. Colefort, being on her death-bed, implored Lady Ivraine to come and see her, as she

wanted to tell her something which had been troubling her conscience for a long time."

The boy was so urgent in his entreaties for her to come, and persisted so resolutely in besieging the hall door till she consented to do so, that at length, greatly against her inclination, Mina agreed to go; and, half sceptical concerning the truth of the tale, and quite certain that she disliked the idea of meeting the woman again, she placed herself under the guidance of the messenger and proceeded towards the place where he informed her Mrs. Colefort dwelt, but of the precise locale of which Mina knew about as much, or perhaps rather less, than the man in the moon.

In and out, up and down, round and across, the boy doubled like a hare; he had told Mina at starting, it was "only a step," but she grew so wearied before their journey was half over, that, finally, she stopped her ragged companion and asked if he did not think they had better get a cab.

"Cab!" he echoed; "I'd like to see the one that could go there;" which consolatory speech gave Mina the idea she was not about to visit an especially select part of the metropolis—and in five minutes more they were in it.

No sage was required to tell the wife of the

Lincolnshire baronet she had got into a most particularly bad neighbourhood; and perhaps, had she been a little more happily situated, had her mind been in a more tranquil state, she might have hesitated to penetrate further, under the sole protection of a ragged impudent urchin, who had the words thief and pickpocket unmistakeably written on every feature of his prematurely old face. But Mina was perfectly reckless and insensible to danger: it was a new phase of existence presented for her consideration; it was something so novel, that it drew her thoughts out of herself and forced her to reflect about others. To the wretched there is unquestionably a balm about the spectacle of wretchedness; it is not a good trait in human nature that this should be so, but most assuredly so it is.

"This is the place," said the boy at last, stopping before a mean low house; and then crossing the threshold, he ran up the stairs and, pushing open a door on the first floor, bade her enter.

"But I can never find my way back alone," said Mina as he was about to leave her; "if I give you a shilling now, will you wait and take me to the nearest cab stand, and then I will give you another?"

"Yes, my lady," said the boy, and he stood with praiseworthy gravity watching her search for her purse, and apparently waiting for, and eagerly expecting, its appearance.

Mina could not, however, discover a trace of it; she tried her pockets; she turned them inside out, to detect if there were any hole through which it might have dropped, and she was just beginning to consider whether she had not left it at home when the faintest twinkle of a smile about the corners of her guide's mouth let light in on the subject.

She looked full in his face, and, though he tried to return her glance with one of unflinching solemnity, she felt perfectly satisfied as to what had become of her money; the thief stood before her, and yet she was aware he might as well be in Canada, so far as her chance of recovering it was concerned.

"My pocket has been picked!" she said; "do you know who did it?"

The lad gazed at her for a moment in silence, then breaking into a perfect yell of laughter he darted down the stairs and out of the house, stumbling in his rapid flight against some persons who were just entering it. "I say, keep out of

the gutter, gov'ner, can't yer?" he shouted, hastily recovering his balance, and addressing an individual whom he had shoved off the narrow side-path into the dirty lane; then suddenly adding, "Oh! my eye, it 's the feller gave me the month on the stepper!" he fled away along the uneven pavement, crying, however, as he ran,

"Oh! I know what you 've come about,—to see Mother Colefort,—but she's receiving genteeler company than ever you were in."

The "company" thus referred to had, in the meantime, entered the squalid chamber wherein a fellow-creature lay apparently dying, and, passing up to the side of the wretched pallet, said, in a low tone,

"You wished to see me, Mrs. Colefort,—here I am."

"Yes, yes," murmured the woman, "I thought you were never going to come; I am very ill,—I may die,—but still I may get bettter, don't you think so?"

"I cannot tell," answered Mina; "God alone knows that, for in His hands are the issues of life and death."

"And if I get better," resumed the hag, unheeding Mina's words, "I shall need gold; and,

if I make you rich, you must make me so too: there have been others here about this very business, but I had rather tell you than any of them. You said the other day you were not rich," she added abruptly; "what would you give to be so?"

"Much!" responded the lady, struck by her tone and manner; but ere she had time to add another word, Mrs. Colefort hurriedly exclaimed,

"Here they come,—here they are again;" and Mina, turning, saw three strangers enter the apartment, followed by one old familiar face.

"Miss Mina," the owner of it cried, and, at the exclamation, all the gentlemen looked surprised, and one in particular scrutinized every feature of her whom Colin Saunders thus addressed.

"Surely," he said, "this is no place for Lady Ivraine to be;" and at the words Mina crimsoned to her temples.

"I came," she answered, "to listen to the confession of a dying woman."

"We are here to receive it," remarked the stranger who had first entered.

There was an awkward pause for a moment, and then the solicitor said,

"If you will allow me to conduct you out of

this locality it will give me the greatest pleasure to do so; if this poor creature desire to relieve her conscience she has now an ample opportunity afforded her, without intruding upon your time;" and, as Mina rightly interpreted this speech into a polite request for her to depart, she passed forth from the room, merely remarking ere she went,

"If there be anything money can procure which might render her situation more endurable, I hope you will let me know;" and then she descended the narrow stairs, followed by Mr. Twining.

They walked on in silence for a considerable period, and it was not till they had reached a more respectable neighbourhood, and regained at once a broader street and a purer atmosphere, that the attorney abruptly began,

"Lady Ivraine, I have heard a great deal of you and your unfortunate history; I am a man of business, old enough to be your father, and have daughters of my own; will you, therefore, on all these accounts, excuse my speaking plainly to you?"

Mina inclined her head in token of assent, and he proceeded,

"I feel a great interest in this affair for many reasons: I am quite aware of all the sad circum-

stances preceding your departure from Paradise, and the unhappy existence you must have led during the lifetime of the late baronet; but that cause of misery being now removed, I do think that, on every account, for your own sake, and for that of your husband and child, you ought to return to Lorton; I am advising you now as if you were my sister or daughter."

"You are very kind," said Mina; "but you say you are aware of all the circumstances which induced me to leave Paradise; I cannot help believing you are mistaken in that idea, and without a full knowledge of——"

"Facts, I am not competent to advise, you would say," he added, finishing the sentence for her. "Well, perhaps not, but let me ask, are *you* fully aware of all that has occurred at Paradise since you quitted it?—of Mrs. Close's death, of Sir Ernest's demise, of his son Henry's return, of the disinheritance of both his children, and the bequest to a grandson,—the boy of his youngest born? Have you heard your husband is literally penniless, that he is perfectly wretched, that his health is very bad, that, in one word, you ought to be at his side now, if you do or ever did love him? His sister-in-law, a sweet and gentle lady, is there

to aid your endeavours to make him forget his sorrows; will you not be advised by one not much accustomed to advise ladies, it is true, but who speaks none the less sincerely to you, who stand in need of some competent counsellor, and in whose welfare your father's faithful dependant, Colin Saunders, has compelled me to take an unwonted interest."

He spoke the last words as he hailed a cab from a neighbouring stand.

"You are fatigued," he added, noticing how her colour came and went and her frame trembled; "I have, perhaps, intruded unwarrantably on you in thus proffering advice; still, if you would grant me the favour of a few moments' conversation to-morrow morning, I think I could give you such information as might induce you to start for Lorton at once."

She paused for a second ere entering the vehicle, as if uncertain what answer to return; then extending her hand she said, in a broken voice,

"Thank you very much for your great kindness; I shall be at home all day to-morrow."

When the cabman turned in the direction of Miss Caldera's home, Mina smiled faintly, as she inclined

her head in answer to Mr. Twining's ceremonious old-fashioned bow.

"Well, there 's not a doubt of its being an uncommonly sweet face," soliloquized the attorney; "I do not marvel now at a son even of Sir Ernest Ivraine marrying for love."

Mina was at home the whole of the next day, but ill in bed and unable to see Mr. Twining; the same answer was returned the following morning; and when, after one day's unavoidable absence, he rapped for the third time at Miss Caldera's residence, he was informed "Lady Ivraine had gone out of town for a few days."

Miss Caldera and he, perhaps, guessed whither, but the former stated she was in no state of health to travel, whilst the latter affirmed he was glad she had tried the experiment at all hazards.

CHAPTER XIII.

BACK TO THE FENS.

It was an English Sunday morning, and, as the bell in the primitive steeple of the rustic church of Lorton tolled forth its earnest summons to the House of God, the worshippers came trooping along singly or in groups of twos and threes; across fields of corn and clover and grass, through shady lanes and quiet country roads, by the verdant margins of rippling streams, from cottage, hall, and every rural nook, they came to "assemble and meet together" in the holy place.

Just as we all finally reach, by divers paths, the grave, so, in like manner—only more calmly and tranquilly—they pursued, by different routes, their way to one common destination,—the temple of the Most High—to hearken to the voice of him who strove to explain to them the solemn mysteries of that eternity which bounds on all

sides the horizon and ends for ever the mortal vision of "man that is born of a woman."

As the old sexton descended from the sort of pigeon box to which he was wont to mount when any of the solemnities of his profession required his presence there, a stranger lady, dressed all in mourning and her face concealed from observation by a thick crape veil, entered the porch and proceeded, like one who had some previous knowledge of the place, up a narrow flight of steps conducting to a dingy little gallery, set apart for and, in some sort, devoted to, the vocalists, or, which was briefly termed by them, the "singing loft."

"Would you not prefer a seat below, ma'am? Sir Hugh Xifer and family are abroad, and I can put you into their pew," said the man in a confidential whisper, expecting, from the appearance of the lady, half-a-crown in acknowledgment of his unsextonish politeness.

A little hand dropped the desired coin into his, which made no scruple of closing upon it, though the day was one the rector frequently selected for exhorting his flock against the sin of covetousness; but the lady continued ascending the stairs, followed closely by the sexton, who thought the least he could do in acknowledgment of her

liberality, was to show some attention, in the shape of a front, or, at all events, cushioned seat.

Quietly rejecting, however, all his overtures of service, the stranger took silent possession of a corner, and there, leaning her forehead against her hand, remained sitting during the greatest portion of the "Order of Morning Prayer."

"There has been one like that inside this church before, or I am greatly mistaken," soliloquized the sexton, tranquilly surveying the gravestones from a comfortable position, during the progress of the first lesson: "I will just keep both my eyes pretty steadily on the lady and see the end of it all;" which resolution keeping him awake, enabled him to hear, though perhaps not to heed, an impressive discourse relative to greed of gain and love of gossip and vexatious interference with the concerns and trials of other people, which was one of a series, wherewith the well-meaning rector sent the majority of his congregation to sleep, Sunday after Sunday.

And she who thus caused one, at least, apparently attentive individual to listen unto the worthy clergyman's somewhat dreary exhortation, was Mina Ivraine.

Sick and dispirited, weary and faint-hearted,

tired in mind, exhausted in body, she had come lonely and far, to see for herself how he looked, determining then to go away for ever, write him a long letter, and die.

She did not wish to live. What, indeed, had she to live for? Her parents, her dear old uncle the laird, and that other uncle who had ever, in his own fashion, been kind and tender to her, were all dead; long, long ago, the solemn sentence of "earth to earth" had been pronounced over each of them: and earth to earth had surely returned, and dust with dust was mingled.

The land of her birth had now ceased to be a pleasant memory, a sight of it was a desire of her heart no more; Glenfiord she had strove never to think of, Craigmaver had become a place, the very mention or remembrance of which she detested.

And though three living ties remained, what were they? A brother toiling under Indian suns, separated from her by oceans and deserts, time, circumstances, poverty; a child whom she was now almost unable to support; a husband who had repented of his marriage, from whose house she had fled with such frantic speed, as if flight could snap the bond, or set him free, or moderate

his father's displeasure, or do him good, or her good, or unmarry either.

What had she to live for? she who had discovered, when it was too late, how much she would then have given to possess even a tithe of the affection she once desired to cast from her. Mina's eyes filled with tears as she asked herself that question; and, amidst the wild tumult of human feelings, memories, sorrows, and regrets, the words which fell from the clergyman's lips were unheard by her, on whom the sexton kept a vigilant watch to the end that she might not escape him.

She felt her husband never could forget the words Cecilia had uttered, nor forgive her ill-judged flight, which, as she found when too late, was calculated to do him no good after all. She fancied she was, could be nothing more, to him; perhaps her child might be dear unto him at some future period not very far remote, when she was at length sleeping quietly, most probably in that very graveyard at which she occasionally glanced through a dingy dirty window at her side.

And he, as well as a sort of obscuring film permitted her to discern his features, seemed changed a little; he appeared, perhaps, a degree older and

thinner than of yore, but still Mina imagined happier also. There was a lady, possibly his sister-in-law, with him, at whom he looked frequently and pleasantly, as though she had been a gleam of sunshine.

Once, when he lifted a book she had dropped and presented it to her, he smiled. Mina caught the perishable expression ere it faded from his face, and, had it been a poisoned dagger, it could not have sent a deeper, sharper pang to her heart. During all the time she had lived at Lorton — seeing him, meeting him, talking to him hourly —she had never beheld a look like that, so bright, so kind, so happy, light up for an instant and change, whilst it rested there, the character of his countenance.

She was right, Miss Caldera wrong,—he had repented him of his marriage; not on her account, but his own: well, he should soon be free now. Death would speedily effect that which Mina Ivraine had been impotent to accomplish, — the breaking of a bond she had tied most recklessly with the simple utterance of the monosyllable, "Yes."

"What had I and my poverty to do with *them?*" she bitterly thought; "why did I ever

blight his happiness by casting the shadow of my sorrow across it? why did I ever come amongst them? what am I doing here, even now? I am nothing to any one, nothing, or worse than nothing: I will go;" and with this intent she arose, ere the clergyman had concluded his sermon, to depart.

But, somehow, when she emerged from the dark gallery into the broad sunlight and was greeted by a warm breath of summer and beauty and perfume, a faintness and sickness overpowered her.

There was a humming as of many voices in her ears; all objects reeled before her sight; then sunshine and summer and beauty faded from her eyes, and Mina Ivraine, for the first time in her life, sank perfectly unconscious to the ground in the porch of that very church which, years previously, she had mournfully entered, a new made, most unhappy wife.

"Just as I thought," complacently remarked the sexton, casting aside her veil and gazing for a moment on the altered face: "she is not like what she used to be; but, if all accounts be true, he 'll be glad enough to see her any way," and the old man, lifting her, with an audible comment to the effect, "that he could carry a dozen of

the same weight," bore her off to a shady spot under a spreading lime-tree, and then, re-entering the church, speedily brought forth the miser's son to see what was lying there.

"And this is she," said one who raised the drooping head and chafed the powerless hands and looked sorrowfully into the colourless face; "oh! Ernest!"

He had stood at first gazing on his wife like one in a dream, bereft of thought and sense and everything, save the power of sight; but, when the spell was broken by those simple words, he sprang wildly forward and, catching her up in his arms as though she had been a child, hurried off with his burden towards "Paradise," almost more rapidly than his sister could follow.

"What in the world, Baronet Ivraine and brother of mine, are you bringing home with you?" inquired Henry, in some surprise, stepping forth from the drawing-room window on to the terrace to gain a nearer view of the object which had attracted his attention; but Ernest, without answering, entered the apartment and deposited Mina on the nearest sofa.

"The truant come back!" exclaimed the other softly, glancing for the first time on the counten-

ance of his brother's wife; "and a very sweet pretty truant it looks, Ernest: where did you find it?"

"Do be quiet, Henry," said she whom Colin Saunders had styled "that angel-faced woman," pushing her husband aside; "leave her to me, you would kill her: do go away for a little, and take Ernest with you;" and, like one accustomed to revive the fainting body and the weary heart, she knelt down by the side of the couch and applied all sorts of restoratives; and at length Mina, opening her eyes and gazing fearfully around the apartment, murmured forth,

"Where am I? I must go."

"Never far from me," said a low sweet voice; and the poor broken-spirited wanderer, faintly conscious that a pair of loving eyes had looked pityingly upon her, fell back once again into a deep swoon. To which succeeded long illness and prostration, both of mind and body; and for weeks Mina hovered betwixt life and death in a closely shaded room, watched and nursed and tended by one who brought a sort of sunshine with her into the dreariest places and the saddest hearts.

Oh! blessed be God, the maker of this lovely earth, for some of the women he has placed upon

it, for the soft dark eyes and the tender voices and the noiseless feet and the gentle hands and the soothing words and the true, steadfast, honest hearts that seem to make themselves ever quietly happy in rendering others so.

Those who cannot count amongst their acquaintances one such, are poor, though possessed of houses and lands; for better than silver and gold is it to call by the name of "friend," one whose path may be traced by the good she has unostentatiously performed; who possesses the magic power — bestowed upon so few, but appreciated by all—of turning, wherever her footsteps wander, tears into smiles, lamentations into rejoicing; who loves truly, steadily, constantly, in "sunshine and in shade," and who never alters, save perhaps to seem a little kinder and nearer when the dark hour of misfortune arrives unto those whom she has known in brighter hours.

One of these meek angels in woman's guise assuredly was Ellen Ivraine; wherever she went, she carried gladness with her; from whatsoever place she departed, blessings and regrets followed her: the most unamiable of her own sex, the most censorious of the other, had never been heard to speak evil of the almost perfect lady.

Faults, even those who loved her best were persuaded dwelt in her nature; but what did that signify, when no one could discover what they were, unless, indeed, the most complete unselfishness and the most unbounded charity towards the foibles and failings of others might be classed as sins amongst those dwelling in a world where selfishness is deemed almost a virtue, and charity (not of the purse alone, but of deed and word and purpose) is a thing so much prated of and little practised, that it is rarely met with, though perpetually preached.

And as a sister might have watched and rejoiced beside the couch, and over the return of a loved and suffering one, so did she, that rich and well-born lady—who could, had such been her desire, have passed her life amidst the bright and gay and happy—soothe and comfort and minister unto the wayward and faithless one, who had never believed in such a woman till she met her, who had never previously been possessed of aught save one true female friend, and that one, though so good of purpose and faithful of heart, so unlike this one,—so totally dissimilar.

"Where is my child?" were the first words Mina uttered when, after days and days, conscious-

ness dimly returned; and, as a stranger placed her daughter beside her, the next question came tremblingly forth,

"And who are you?"

"One who should have been your friend long ago," was the response, "and who will be so now, —your sister, dear Mina, wife to your husband's brother."

"Niece to the Earl of——"

"No, no," hastily interrupted the other, "only Ellen Ivraine, who heard of you long ago, and talked of, and sorrowed for, and wept because of you. Our fathers were both soldiers,—both commoners; where I have only one earl you can point to a line of ancestors, tracing back, for aught I know, to the Deluge. No, no," she repeated more earnestly, "never let aught of that kind come between us: Mina to me you shall always be, and Ellen Ivraine till death I must remain. We are both women, both mothers, have both suffered, and, if that be not sufficient to make us friends, we have married two brothers, and must, consequently, whether we will or no, be sisters;" and, as she concluded her rapid sentence, she pressed her lips so lovingly on Mina's forehead that the poor weakened invalid, twining her arms about the

slender neck, laid her tired head on that loving breast, and wept there like a child in the embrace of its mother.

Thus, when she got a little better, she told her all the weary story, from beginning to end, —the woman's heart of the listener comprehending and pitying every minute feeling of the narrator.

As Mina had never previously talked to mortal she spoke to her: there was not a thought of her soul,—a wish, a folly, a sensation, so far as she herself was cognizant thereof,—that she did not lay bare before the clear, steady, sensible, yet gentle, eye of her new friend—her unswerving advocate.

She concealed nothing, exaggerated nothing, extenuated nothing; if ever a plain unvarnished tale were told, it was that heard by the wife of the younger brother, and spoken by the lips of her who had once been the heart-broken bride of the elder.

What she could not have said to her husband, had a lifetime of happiness been offered to her as the reward of doing so, she managed to explain to her sister-in-law; and, when the whole story was finished,—when Mina at length, having no-

thing more to add, raised her eyes imploringly to that sweet face, as if entreating it never to look coldly upon her, the elder lady, drawing her closer to her, answered,

"I see and feel, and understand it all,—I comprehend your heart and its unfounded doubts and its strong affections and its vague foolish fancies, better, far better, than its possessor; but never question his love again: be assured it was for you, and only for you, he regretted his marriage; let me make peace between you,—only talk to him one half so openly as you have spoken to me, and life need never again be to you what unhappily life has hitherto been. I am an impartial judge of his character, Mina, and I tell you, in all sincerity, I believe your heart would as soon cease to love your child as that of Ernest Ivraine swerve, in more than outward appearance, from the strong, devoted attachment he always felt for you before you married him, during the period of your residence here, after that thoughtless, foolish creature sowed disunion between you. I know what you have been to him during your absence; I feel what you will become and remain to him so long as memory and sensation last,—until death, dear Mina, and—after."

And in a few brief words that kind-hearted lady told Ernest all.

"Go to your wife and hear the story from her lips," she added; "she, not I, should be the one to speak of these things to you."

It was not because there was the faintest trace of anger lingering in his breast that he hesitated to comply with his sister's request; he felt as though Mina never would talk to him as she had talked to that gentle woman, as if he should not know what to say to her, as if long habits of reserve could not be shaken off in a moment, as if Mina were still to him an unsolved mystery,—a creature that, even whilst he loved, he should never be able to understand; but Mrs. Ivraine would take no denial, she insisted that "talk it out together they ought, that have an explanation with Mina he must," and accordingly, very reluctantly and half-sheepishly, like an awkward, timid schoolboy, he went.

It was a glorious September day, and Mrs. Ivraine had placed the invalid close to a window opening on the terrace, all fringed and brilliant with an unwonted display of autumn flowers; there was something in the appearance of that wasted form which struck home at once to the

soul of the miser's son; a hundred memories rushed to his mind as he entered the apartment: he thought of the time when he had first seen her, of all that had occurred since then, of her sufferings, of her patience, of the tale his sister-in-law had but just told him, of the wretched life he had compelled her to endure for the sake of a legacy which he never obtained; he remembered the words he had spoken,—the words which drove her from that very habitation; he felt softened and touched by her voluntary return to him in his poverty, by the affection she must have borne him when she crept back so secretly to Lorton to see him "ere she died." And as all these recollections swelled up in his bosom his sternness melted away, and his reserve almost departed; and, drawing near to the chair she occupied, he said, taking her wasted little hand in his,

"And so, Mina, you have come home to share the fortunes of a beggar; Ellen tells me you have heard Sir Ernest Ivraine is little better than a pauper, and it turns out you have married a man who, in the middle of life, must either work for a competency or else starve."

"I never married you for money, Ernest," she began, "never; did not she tell you that, too?

I knew, before I became your wife, you were not rich, might never be so. Because of the love he bore my father, because of his having known me from the time I was a child, Colin Saunders thought it his duty to tell me all; he knew my temper and feared I might not be able to submit patiently, but I thought I would try; and I did try very hard, and I could have submitted and borne everything patiently for your sake till the end, had I not believed you would have been happier without me, that I was the sole obstacle between you and great wealth; then I felt it only right to free you as far as I could. I never meant to return again, but to go away and let you all forget me. I thought if I were out of sight your father would grow fond of you, and that then you might be happy again: it was all of no use though. Yet, even now, I cannot help fearing it was I who prevented your being rich, that it is because of me you are a beggar."

She uttered the last few words hurriedly, and looked eagerly in her husband's face to read if he thought so too, and if he were very sorry for it.

"No, Mina, no," he answered; "if you had never existed, if I had never met you, if we had never been married, if I had never loved you

better than anything else in the world, it would have been just the same. Henry was always my father's favourite son, and from the moment he cleared a conspicuous passage for himself in the world's wide, crowded thoroughfare, my fate was sealed. Perhaps—I do not know—but perhaps, had I remained unmarried, the money might have been bequeathed to Henry instead of to his son, but that is the only difference it could possibly have made. I spent the best years of existence waiting for a chance,—Henry's success turned the scales against me, and I lost."

"And you are quite sure of that,—quite sure it was he, not I," she said, laying an entreating hand on his arm.

Once he had shaken it off,—once he had done so amongst the blue Highland hills, close to the free silent moors, which the heart of his wife had loved so much in childhood. Once he had shaken it angrily off, but he did not do so now, amidst the fens and swamps, in the home Mina had trembled to enter; he clasped it between his own and answered,

"Sure, quite sure, dear Mina; but had it been otherwise——"

"A gentleman in the dining-room, Sir Ernest,

wishes to see you immediately, on important business," interrupted a servant, at this juncture flinging open the door; and, on the strength of this urgent summons, he departed, leaving behind him, however, such joy as, for years previously, Mina had never felt.

"If there could only have been time given for him to have finished that sentence," she thought as she closed her eyes and leaned back in the chair, buried in grateful musings.

Reclining in that old-fashioned chair, her slight figure supported by crimson cushions, which made her pale face look paler by contrast, the dark eyelashes lying long and heavy on her cheek, and a sort of placid expression, like that which so frequently beautifies the features of the early dead, pervading her whole countenance, Mina certainly did wonderfully resemble a corpse, or, at all events, a person fast travelling the road to the tomb, who had almost reached the final goal; her dark hair having become unfastened, fell over her neck and shoulders as it used to do when she was a child bounding across the lawns at Glenfiord; but the flush had paled from her cheek since then, and left it white as marble: she looked so unlike anything destined for length of days, so worn, ema-

ciated, fragile, that one who had been unsuspectedly gazing on her through the open window, unable longer to restrain his feelings, stepped hurriedly into the room and, wringing his hands piteously together by the side of the chair, cried, in a sort of choking voice,

"My bairn! my bairn! my dear Miss Mina, going to dee, going to leave us a' and dee?"

"No, Colin," Mina answered, opening her eyes and smiling—oh! so differently from her wont—on the old man who thus apostrophized her; "no, Colin; I have changed my mind about that;" and she shook back her curls somewhat in her old wilful way, as she added, "people don't want to leave the earth when they are happy on it, so I have changed my mind about dying."

"And you are happy?" he said; "then you have heard all."

"All what?" she demanded.

"About the money; your great fortune."

"My fortune! what are you talking about, Colin?"

"Then you have not heard," he answered, "and maybe I ought not to have told you, Miss Mina; but, since I have made a beginning, I may as well make an end, and let ye know your

uncle's marriage turns out to have been just no marriage at all, and there's one hundred and sixty thousand pounds to the good still, we expect to get for you and Mr. Malcolm."

Mina started from her seat at the words. Mrs. Ivraine had given her strict injunctions not to attempt walking, even across the room, without assistance, fancying she was too weak to try the experiment; but the intelligence seemed to have put new life into her frame.

"Are you speaking the truth, Colin Saunders?" she cried: "all that fortune for me? all my own? are you sure?"

"It's truth, if it were my last words," he answered.

She uttered one loud cry of delight, and, darting out of the room, the first person she encountered in the corridor was he of whom she was rushing in search.

"Oh! Ernest," she said, flinging her arms around his neck, "Colin tells me I am to have eighty thousand pounds, which will clear off all mortgages, and I am so glad; just say one thing—you are not sorry you married me now."

The words implied a reproach, though she did not mean that they should do so. Ernest Ivraine

drew her closer towards him, but made no reply. She felt his frame trembling with strong emotion: he bent his head on his wife's shoulder and, for the first time for years, for the first time since boyhood, wept.

It was a sufficient response; and, from that day forth, not even a shadow of a cloud rested between them to mar their peace, for Mina had at length fulfilled the purpose she had uttered before marriage. "I will enter even the miser's home and try whether I cannot render that home happier unto *him*."

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

Mina Ivraine and Malcolm Frazer did get, not quite one hundred and sixty thousand pounds, but that amount less one third between them, which sum sufficed to enable the latter to come home in magnificent nabob style from India, and start as a grand sort of modern chieftain in the Highlands, where—experience and sorrow having taught him many valuable lessons—he led an almost useful life, aided in his good endeavours and exhorted to economy and unselfishness by—what, in other years, he might not have deserved—about one of the best wives that ever existed, youngest sister to Mrs. Henry Ivraine, and possessing, if not quite all that lady's virtues, at least an abundant share of her own.

And the portion belonging to Mina paid off the mortgages on Paradise, and left a very sufficient overplus besides.

It is true, there was an immense difficulty about undoing the knot Mrs. Merapie had never possessed any legal right to tie; there was such swearing and counter-swearing, such producing of evidence and summoning of witnesses, and taking of oaths and procuring of certificates, and making of affidavits, and raising of objections, as drove Colin almost frantic and kept Mr. Twining and all other parties concerned, either directly or indirectly, in a perpetual state of anything rather than pleasurable excitement.

As, however, you, dear reader, are not a juryman called to decide upon the merits of the case, but simply a very patient auditor, respectfully solicited to listen to the result of a long-protracted trial, hearkened to by three judges, and fought over by gentlemen in huge wigs and silk gowns to the number of nine, suffice it to say, that the matter was finally brought to a conclusion, about a year after Mina's return to Paradise, by a decision in favour of the plaintiffs, Ivraine and another, this latter word representing Malcolm Frazer.

Then there was a warrant granted for the apprehension of Edward Maxwell, alias Alfred Westwood, on a charge of wilful murder; but, as no evidence of any kind could be adduced against

him, and as he declined to throw the least light on the subject himself, that affair fell to the ground; and, as regarded the next, his apprehension for the old bank affair, he first procured bail and then, gathering the bulk of his property together, fled from England, leaving his sureties to pay the piper. They did so, and some people were so ill-natured as to say they lost nothing by the transaction, that it was altogether a preconcerted affair, and that, if they appeared to be great sufferers in public, they were very resigned martyrs and willing gainers in private.

So ill-natured people said; but then what is the use of repeating or believing one half the things which contribute to form the curious and very rarely instructive *mélange*, styled in conversation, "topics of the day."

After a while, the whole business was forgotten; and it was only when some wandering Londoner casually informed a friend that he had seen that fellow "Westwood" in Milan, Naples, Vienna, Madrid, or Stockholm, that the story of his life was alluded to; but, as hath already been stated in this tale, no one ever managed to get a near sight of the history of his existence and read it through from beginning to end. In flying from

a prison and from a wife, it is true, glimpses were caught of him at uncertain intervals, but the places where he was seen were so wide apart, and the characters he assumed were so different, that it was impossible to follow his track with any degree of certainty; so, in due course, his wife discovered, for she tried to do so. In the prime of life, or rather when its evening shadows were just beginning to steal across his path, he started off a wanderer on the face of the earth: just at the period at which he had mentally intended, years previously, to retire, buy an estate, and get into capital country society, he commenced a sort of rich vagabond fugitive career; and, if he had been at all given to literature, a strange wild medley of falsehood and fact would have been presented to the public of his varied adventures.

Like the Russian spy, of whom most have heard, whom many have met, he was everywhere, —in the best places, amongst the best company; he was successively entertained as a *milor* in Italy, as a *millionaire* in Spain, as a *savant* in Germany, as a man of wit and fashion in France. He produced quite a *furore* in America, crossed thence to an island in the Pacific, and enacted the part of king there for a period; subsequently he

gained the confidence of an Indian prince, and lorded it in eastern pomp till he wearied of his station, or, what is more probable, deemed his neck in jeopardy. His finishing exploit was turning Mussulman, and obtaining great favour in the eyes of a Sultan of Turkey, during whose reign he lived in splendour, surrounded by the gorgeous magnificence of that luxuriant clime, steeped in perfumes, buried in divans, laden with jewels, admired, honoured, consulted—a man of weight and esteem and consideration, a person whose frown was to be dreaded, whose smile was to be courted, —till his patron, the Sultan, died; but immediately consequent on that event, the favourite disappeared: whether he were poisoned, assassinated, bowstrung, or otherwise privately and effectually removed from a public sphere of action, never accurately transpired. Some imagined he fled to other lands, joined the Arabs under the shade of the date trees of the desert, or contrived to gain the confidence of the tribes of Tartary; whilst others maintained that the new Sultan put him *hors de combat*, and by some brief means stopped his wandering feet from further travel for ever.

How it was I know not, one thing alone being certain—that his end, like his life, was a mystery.

Where he was born none could tell, where his body rests no friend or enemy can say: he disappeared. These two words express the sum total of the information which ever was gained about him, and it ought to prove satisfactory to all disinterested parties, when, on the strength of it, his widow entered for the third time the state matrimonial, and espoused an old gentleman whose housekeeper she had long been, "ever since the entire loss of our fortune," as she always piteously stated, though Mina and Malcolm had, out of regard to their uncle's memory, agreed to allow her an annuity, and provided handsomely for her son, who, by way of evincing his gratitude for their liberality, first wrote a squib against Sir Ernest and Lady Ivraine, then induced a friend, the editor of a country newspaper, to publish it, and finally denied all knowledge of the transaction, when an action for libel was threatened.

Henry Ivraine's son never succeeded to the baronetcy, but in after times—not so very long after the death of his father either—within ten happy years, there was a Governor-General of India created Lord Ivraine, the first of that title, in consideration of important military and civil services; and that Governor-General was Henry,

his father's youngest born, the favourite son of the miser Sir Ernest,—Henry, who would not wait for a fortune, but went boldly forth and won it.

And much he did win truly, reader,—not merely wealth, position, renown, respect, admiration, but the love of a woman, who walked by his side till grey hairs shaded the temples of both, and who, seated in an old ancestral hall, told, in the calm, lovely evening of her days, to her children's children, the story of her husband's early struggles, his brave resolves and their great fulfilment.

And the miser's eldest born, Ernest Ivraine? "Mina," he said, one glad spring morning, to his wife, as she stood beside him on the terrace commanding a dreary prospect over the now unencumbered estate, its swamps, its trees, its morasses, and its streams, "Mina, should you like to buy Glenfiord and go back to Scotland?"

She made no reply, but looked first over the mournful view from Paradise and then wistfully into her husband's face. He knew she was contrasting the two places, the present and the remembered, thinking of the wild scenery and the bracing air and the rocks and the hills and the streams and the valleys and the moors of her fatherland.

So was he, for he had lately made a second

journey thither, and the beauty of that land had been a dream of his soul ever since. Their feelings and wishes were identical: he read that fact in her face and proceeded,

"An experimental farmer, with—I think—more money in his pockets than brains in his head, wants to take a long lease of Paradise, and, as I knew of no other house you would like so well, I agreed with the executors of the late General Warmond for the purchase of that romantic place, where, if you choose, we may settle quietly down and live happily!"

Choose, how could she but choose to go whither her husband wished, whither her own desires tended, whither happiness followed their footsteps, —where content and peace and confidence dwelt for ever more?

Once again children bounded over the lawns, a light pleasure-boat glided across the loch; the daughter of a Frazer was mistress of her father's former home, and Sir Ernest, her stern melancholy husband, shook at last the gloom from his soul, cleared the shadow from his brow, welcomed friend and relative cordially to his hospitable board, grasped Allan Frazer's hand in friendship, and behaved with wonderful politeness towards the laird's accomplished wife.

He and she never came together,—they never saw the same people at the same time, they never travelled in company.

There was no actual separation, no investigation in the ecclesiastical courts about incompatibility of temper, no suit instituted for alimony, no stating of mutual grievances, no catering for the public amusement by an *exposé* of private unhappiness; but, whenever she went to Craigmaver, he shifted his quarters to Edinburgh; when she came to Edinburgh, he took horse for Craigmaver: it was a quietly understood matter amongst their dependants that Mr. and Mrs. Frazer did not "sort," and genteeler intimates went a step further and asserted "Craigmaver hated her." So nobody ever dreamed of inviting the husband and wife together, even to a State dinner party; and thus it chanced, whenever Cecilia came to see her "dear Mina" in May, Allan deferred his visit until June.

So they managed their matrimonial routes; and a much more agreeable mode both discovered it to be than squabbling at home in Edinburgh, or silently sulking over a *tête-à-tête* Highland breakfast.

"She wears me out," Allan once said; "I cannot be tormented with her;" and in bodily presence he never was.

They had their own separate establishments, servants, pursuits, pleasures, acquaintances, friends,—a vast deal better arrangement than wrangling and scolding and making every mortal about them miserable, I admit; yet still not, on the whole, a very desirable method of running in matrimonial harness.

Allan Frazer was not a very happy man on the strength of it, at all events; the most peaceful portions of his unsatisfactory existence were those he spent in his cousin's home at Glenfiord, riding over the hills with her husband, singing old melodies for them in the summer twilight, teaching the children of the southern gentleman all kinds of northern lore, and telling them about the Highlands, where he had as beautiful a place as Glenfiord, and was called by hundreds of honest tongues, in a broad Gallic accent, "the laird."

He flung aside literature and its cares, forgot matrimony and its sorrows, pined not for youth and its hopes whilst he remained amongst them. "I grow almost young and happy again whilst here," he said to Ernest Ivraine; and Ernest wished he could stay there always, for the baronet grew at length to like him so much, that he finally declared, next to his wife, children, and brother, there was no one in the world in whose joys and

sorrows, pleasures and troubles, he took so near and deep an interest as in those of Allan Frazer, —whose wife never altered, save that she changed from an unamiable, beautiful young woman to a spiteful, faded, middle-aged one, who, fortunately for the comfort of all parties, died before her son Charles—as he had been called, after General Warmond — married Eliza, the baronet's eldest daughter, she who kept Mina's heart from des pair in those dreary days at Paradise.

That marriage cemented the friendship between the two families by a stronger tie of relationship than had previously existed; and, after it, peace came to the soul of Allan Frazer, and the even- ing of his life was brighter than its morning; and the old Laird of Craigmaver, dwelling with his son and his son's wife in that beautiful home, the last possession of his clan, looking forth on the hills and the mountains, the lake and the pines, was happier than the young laird, surrounded by luxury and wealth and pomp and fashion, had ever been. He thanked God for the daughter wherewith, in his later days, He had blessed him; and well he might, so Miss Caldera affirmed;— Miss Caldera, whom Mina had taken one day, soon after her arrival at Glenfiord, to see a little

bijou of a cottage, surrounded by a perfect wilderness of flowers, commanding one of the fairest views in Scotland. Her former pupil led her through the few rooms it contained, along the grassy garden paths, and then back again into the house.

"Do you remember, old friend," said Mina, "once telling me you had a wish, and my answering that, if I were rich, it should soon be in reality? About the greatest pleasure I ever felt in my life was superintending the altering and furnishing of this place, which you won't be too proud to accept from your once wayward Mina: it's a very small gift from me to you, who were a mother at one period, a friend, sister, adviser always; I hope you will not gauge my love for you by the size of the house I ask you to live in."

And Mina put her arms about Miss Caldera, who could only weep in reply; and tears being the most contagious of all feminine disorders, Mina took to weeping also, and they jointly cried the matter out in that sunny little drawing-room, for the strangest of all conceivable reasons, because they were so happy.

Miss Caldera did not live much at the cottage, however: she spent most of her time at Glenfiord; but still that place was her retreat, her

home, her pride: she was at last mistress of a house, possessed of property, buried in flowers, poetry, romance, content, tranquillity. And although, till the end of her days, she persisted in asserting to Mina, that "marrying for a home was a judicious step, and not a bad thing after all," yet it was remarked that, from the period of Mina's wedding, she never took upon herself the responsibility of advising any one to marry or give in marriage; and when Mina, then still a pretty woman, though verging a little into the sere and yellow leaf of middle age, asked her confidentially what she thought of the proposed match between Charlie Frazer and Eliza Ivraine, the lady promptly responded,

"Match them yourself, my dear, or leave it alone, whichever you think best, but ask me nothing about it, for I vowed, after your affair, I would never meddle in such matters more. I know now what a marriage may produce, what yours might have produced, what I once expected it would, but what I can never feel sufficiently thankful it did not."

"And what was that?" Mina demanded, though she knew perfectly well, none better.

"A lifetime of misery to the parties married,

a lifetime of regret to all who advised the step," responded Miss Caldera; "and you know, Mina, as well as I, a period was when your happiness hung just suspended by a thread: fate touched the fortunate scale, however, and you are what you are; but had it been otherwise——. Ah!" she added, rising, "I can scarcely bear to contemplate that chance, even now; and it was a likely enough one then, far more likely, I confess, than this."

* * * * * *

Under the shadow of the Glenfiord roof-tree a home was made for a white-haired man, whom Mina Ivraine loved as the sole tie which connected the past and the present, as the last survivor of old times.

It was a lovely sight to see how her children were wont to nestle around "good Colin," as they styled the old Highlander, who, leaning on his staff, surveyed the noisy group with a proud, satisfied expression, as if the last wish of his soul were gratified in seeing the wild, happy, beautiful, kind-hearted descendants of his dear Captain Allan, giving to that glorious scene all it wanted to make it perfect,—life, animation, the hum and stir and

joy and excitement of careless, thoughtless, happy, youthful existence.

But, at length, he went to his long home also. After he had been ailing for a considerable period, one evening a message came to inform Mina he was dying. She sprang up from the dining-table where the tidings reached her, and, with the impetuosity of other days, with the unchecked sorrow of her childhood's vehement morn, rushed to his bedside.

"Oh! no, no, Colin," she cried, "you must not die, I cannot do without you; this will break my heart: we cannot spare you yet."

The aged man turned his glazed eyes on her troubled features, and a faint smile quivered around his mouth as he said,

"Dinna hinder me, Miss Mina dear, for I am going hame,—hame to God, who sent me here, who ca's me hence. It is His will: tak' patience, Miss Mina, tak' patience, for we will a' meet again in heaven."

And Mina Ivraine did take patience at last,—she hushed her sobs, she subdued her grief, she closed the eyelids of as true, good and honest a man as ever existed; and then she walked quietly to her own chamber, thinking about his latest words and the calm tenor of his entire life.

In the churchyard beneath, under the shadow of Ben Lomond, near to that loch which he always believed to be the finest and the loveliest in the world, they laid him tenderly and peacefully down to sleep, and the descendants of that, the most faithful retainer of the proud old Frazer clan, point with honest exultation to a monument which bears this inscription,

"Erected to the memory of Colin Saunders, by his friends Mina and Ernest Ivraine and Malcolm Frazer."

It spoke volumes for the man who left such friends behind him. Dear reader, may we be able to do as much, according to our means, for some on the earth as he did for them!

THE END.

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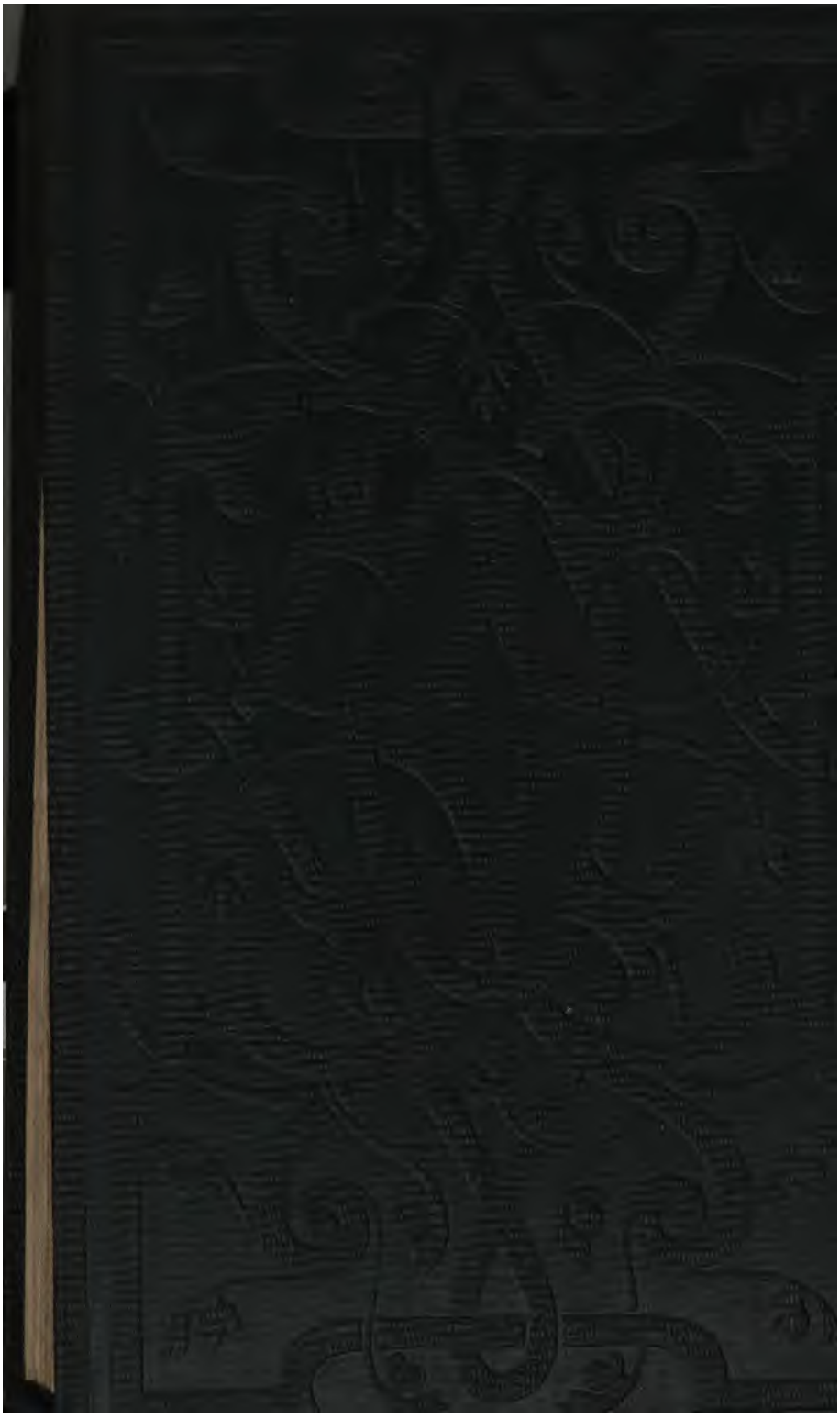
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